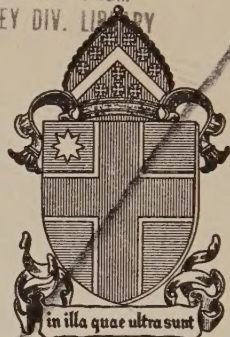


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**Woodward, C. S. (Clifford Salisbury),
1878-**

Christ in the common ways of life



CHRIST IN THE COMMON
WAYS OF LIFE

CHRIST IN THE COMMON WAYS OF LIFE

BY

C. S. WOODWARD

CANON OF WESTMINSTER

WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY
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INTRODUCTION

EUROPE was converted by the unknown witnesses :

“The unknown good who rest
In God’s still memory folded deep.”

Lowell.

and it is to those quiet witnesses to-day that this book is addressed. The author has chosen a good title : *Christ in the Common Ways of Life.*

He shows how simple Christ’s teaching was ; such a contrast to the gigantic edifice of Theology which has been built upon it.

We may see how inevitable that growth was when questions arose as to the exact meaning of that teaching, and yet it is indeed refreshing to be brought back to the quiet teaching of our Lord “under the stars” about “Our Father which art in Heaven.” He shows how plain men want a simple Gospel and find it in Christianity, and yet he shows how searching that Gospel is in its bearing upon our work, our amusements, our use of money and our attitude towards social questions.

I was reading in some excellent sermons by Dean Robbins of New York a saying of James Russell Lowell, from whose beautiful poem on “All Saints Day” I have quoted, that “There is enough dynamite in the New Testament to blow all our existing institutions to pieces, if illegitimately applied. The social message of Jesus,” the Dean goes on to say, “is dynamite.”

What we have to do—I am paraphrasing the teaching of Canon Woodward's work—is to use the dynamite the *right* way, and used in this way it would revolutionise, without destroying, the life of many of us.

It is because there is so little *difference* between the life of the nominal Christian and the life of the man of the world that Christianity does not attract as it should ; it is the religion which demands sacrifices which wins the allegiance of the young to-day.

The chapter I like best is Chapter V, on "The Childlike Spirit." The author is very good with children, and understands their minds, and there is great truth in his assertion that the four characteristics of the child are greatly needed to-day, the freedom from worry, the hopefulness which is always building castles in the air, the child's independence of criticism, and his frankness and spontaneity. It is the loss of all this, the author goes on to say, "which has done more than anything else to destroy the freshness and attractiveness of Christianity, for it is hardly an exaggeration to say that Christ has no greater foes than those of His own household, the middle-aged Christians of whom the Church is full !" (page 42).

He hastens to add that it is not a question of age—"some men are middle-aged at twenty-five, while others remain children at heart long after they are white-headed." I trust that this book will bring back to some of us "the heart of a child." The saying "that those whom the gods love die young" is often misunderstood, as in many stories the really good choir boy seldom lives to get out of the choir, but my belief is that the real meaning is quite different, "Those whom the gods love are young when they die," and in that sense may we all *die young*.

A. F. LONDON.

CONTENTS

CHAPT.		PAGE
I.	WHAT THINK YE OF CHRIST? . . .	I
II.	THE TEACHER AND HIS METHODS . . .	9
III.	THE FIRST AND GREAT COMMANDMENT . . .	19
IV.	THE OFFERING OF SELF	28
V.	THE CHILDLIKE SPIRIT	36
VI.	THE SPIRIT OF SERVICE	44
VII.	OUR DAILY WORK	52
VIII.	AMUSEMENTS	60
IX.	MONEY	68
X.	CITIZENSHIP	76
XI.	THE ENABLING SPIRIT	84
XII.	THE VISION OF THE KINGDOM	93

CHAPTER I

WHAT THINK YE OF CHRIST?

A LEGITIMATE criticism of many books about religion, as of the majority of sermons, is that they assume a greater depth of spiritual experience and a greater interest in theology than ordinary people possess. There are very many Churchmen who, if they spoke openly about such things, would be bound to own that the mystical side of religion is beyond them ; they find it difficult to pray except in the simplest way ; and they know that the Sacraments do not mean to them what they obviously mean to some. It is for such people that this book is intended. It will be of little value to those who have advanced some way in spiritual experience. There are many books written by masters of the religious life which give such people what they want. Thomas a Kempis, William Law, and Brother Lawrence among the classics, and a host of modern writers have provided for their needs. But there are comparatively few books about religion written on the level of the ordinary man, which is, perhaps, one reason why ordinary men seldom read religious books. And yet the world is full of plain men, who are anxious for the most part to do the right thing, to help and not to hinder the coming of the Kingdom, and who are looking, very many of them, for a standard by which to test their actions, for fixed principles to apply to the ever-changing problems of life, for an ideal towards which to train their characters.

2 CHRIST IN THE COMMON WAYS OF LIFE

They will find all for which they are seeking in the life and teaching of Jesus Christ, and their greatest need is a clearer understanding of what He was and what He taught.

I remember years ago hearing a well-known writer on religious subjects use a startling illustration to express what Jesus had come to mean to him. He reminded us of the incident in *Alice in Wonderland* when Alice began to grow and grow, until she was immeasurably taller than everyone and everything about her. And then he went on to say—I wish I could remember his actual words—that the more he thought of Jesus Christ the more he felt that that was true of Him. He seemed increasingly, as time went on, to overtop everybody and everything else in the world. He was the one Person who mattered and His teaching the one thing which counted in the whole history of the human race.

That seems to me to be even more true to-day than it was fifteen years ago, when the address from which I have borrowed the illustration was given. I believe that Jesus counts for more in the minds of thinking men to-day than He has ever done before, and I have little doubt that He will count for still more as the years go on. There is hardly any department of life in which His standards are not becoming the criterion by which things are judged. Opinions may differ as to the application of those standards to the common life and there may still be individuals who maintain that the world cannot and ought not to be organised on the lines laid down in the Sermon on the Mount. But differences of opinion are not always so contradictory as they appear upon the surface and the number of those who are convinced that the world can only be saved by obedience to the principles which Jesus taught is certainly increasing.

All of which brings us back to the plain man. Mysticism may be above his head ; he may find it hard to pray ; Sacramentalism in its more highly developed forms may seem beyond him. But Jesus Christ, the Prophet of Nazareth, to whom the common people of the Galilean villages listened gladly, is neither above him nor beyond him. Here is a path in which the wayfaring man, though a fool, cannot err, and it is a path which, if he sets out upon it, will lead him in the end to the presence of God Himself.

But at the outset we must define our relationship to Jesus Christ. What think ye of Christ ? is the question which now, as nineteen hundred years ago, must be answered before we can profitably consider the implications of His teaching. Again and again in the Epistles we are reminded that belief in Him is the first essential of discipleship. We must believe in Him before we can truly follow Him. And here the plain man immediately finds himself faced by a difficulty. What do we mean when we ask him to believe in Jesus Christ ? Do we mean that he must assent to the truth of certain theological conclusions ? Must he commit himself to the Virgin Birth, or to traditional explanations of the Atonement, or to abstruse definitions of His Divinity, such as are contained in the Athanasian Creed ? I do not suggest that these are unimportant matters, but I am not convinced that they are of equal importance for everyone. It is possible to be a very good Christian, but a very poor theologian, and there are, as there always have been, tens of thousands of sincerely Christian men and women to whom theology, in its technical sense, is and must be a closed book. The language in which it is expressed and the ideas of which it treats are on a different plane from that on which they live. One need not be an astronomer

4 CHRIST IN THE COMMON WAYS OF LIFE

to enjoy the beauty of the stars, nor need one be an expert in theology to be a friend and follower of Christ.

What, then, does believing in Jesus mean? It means, I think, three things. First we must believe in Him as a real historical Person who lived in Palestine nineteen centuries ago. That sounds a platitude, but like many platitudes it needs to be emphasised. It is never very easy to grasp the reality of someone who lived long before our age amidst surroundings very different from our own. And it is much more difficult when we are dealing with an outstanding character, with someone whose life and work have made a profound impression upon the history of the world. Such men, through their very greatness, become almost legendary heroes rather than creatures of flesh and blood. We none of us find it easy to visualise Socrates, or Julius Cæsar, or even Shakespeare or Napoleon as human beings like ourselves. They are names which stand for great achievements in the field of thought or action, rather than individuals whose lives were fundamentally not unlike our own. And when we come to Jesus Christ, the difficulty is increased a hundredfold. The absolutely central place He holds in the history of the human race, His manifest unlikeness to other men, the controversies which from the earliest times have been waged about His nature, have combined to surround Him with an atmosphere through which it is hard to penetrate to the real, living Person, Who made so profound an impression on those who knew Him and listened to Him. He has been badly served in this respect by those who have tried to represent Him to the world. Painters and hymn writers, through their desire to emphasise the superhuman element in the Master, have too often succeeded in de-humanising and almost de-vitalising Him, so that the

impression left by their pictures and their hymns is of One Whom we cannot conceive to have ever lived in our world at all.

The first thing, then, is to convince ourselves that at a definite time—not so long ago, as the history of the world goes—there was living in a country—not so far from our own—a boy whose name was Jesus. We must picture Him growing to manhood in a little town amongst the hills, earning His livelihood as a carpenter and supporting by His labour the mother with whom He lived. Then at the age of thirty we must see Him, in obedience to an instinct which had been working within Him all His life, turning His back on the home He loved and going out into the world alone, to teach His fellow-countrymen the truths which should make them free. We must watch Him gathering a little band of friends, young men like Himself, with whom He wandered from village to village, over the hills or beside the Lake, attracting multitudes in every place to which He came, and preaching everywhere in homely language the story of God's love. We must go with Him on His visits to Jerusalem and note the interest which His presence there never failed to arouse, the opposition of the rulers, the questionings of the people, who felt in their hearts the difference between Him and all other religious teachers they had known. We must mark the growing hostility of His enemies and the calmness with which He faced it, until when His work was done He surrendered to their will and came to Calvary.

That is the first meaning of belief in Jesus Christ. We must believe that He really lived in the world in which we live to-day. But that is not all ; our faith in Him must take us further. As we read the familiar story of His life and ponder on what He was and what He

6 CHRIST IN THE COMMON WAYS OF LIFE

taught, we shall be led, as were His disciples, to see that He was not as other men. In Him we have a personality which differs from every other that the world has known.

That is the impression which He made upon His contemporaries ; it is an impression which has grown stronger as the years have passed. He spoke of God with an assurance and an intimacy which is not to be found in any other teacher ; He spoke to man with an authority which is lacking in all the rest. There was something in His bearing which startled His friends and even awed His enemies. He was in the world, more truly in it than were any of His rivals—one of their charges against Him was that He loved the world too much. And yet He was somehow not of the world. Even while He moved about in the common ways of men and lived the common life, He seemed detached from the world as though His real life was all the time elsewhere. That was the impression He made on those who knew Him, and reflection on His life has confirmed their judgment. Putting aside all question of miracle and of the supernatural events recorded of Him, no unbiassed student of the Gospels can deny that there is in Jesus something which transcends humanity as we know it, something which cannot be explained by any theory of abnormal powers of intuition or of such exceptional inspiration as belonged to Isaiah and the Prophets. Here is One on a different plane from theirs, One whose relationship with God is unlike that of the most saintly amongst men.

And so we are brought to His Divinity. We may be unable to grasp the full meaning of the word ; we only know that He overtops the whole human race as the central peak in a mountain chain overtops the foothills from which it rises. We can only explain Him by holding that in Him the Divine Spirit was present in the fullest

and completest measure, that He was utterly free from the limitations which curb and thwart our higher impulses, that He had an immediate and unhindered sense of fellowship with God, that to Him the mysteries of the Divine nature were no mystery, for He knew where other men had only guessed. And so we sum it up—using poor human language to express what we feel, but cannot fully understand—by calling Him the Son of God.

Here then is the second stage of our belief in Jesus Christ. We believe that He lived a truly human life, and we believe that so living He was more than man. But we do not stop there ; there is still a further step to take. A vital faith, a faith which will affect our daily lives, must have a personal element in it. It is our personal relationship towards Him that matters. It is not enough to believe that nineteen hundred years ago there lived in Palestine One Whom we call the Son of God. We must come to believe in Him as schoolboys believe in their heroes or many a soldier believed in his captain in the War. The faith by which men live is not a dead creed, but a wholehearted acceptance of Jesus Christ as the Master of their lives, the Inspiration of their actions, the Leader Whom all too feebly they try to follow. That is what believing in Jesus means. It is the conviction that in Him we have One Who came forth from God, to reveal His nature and His will for man, that in His teaching there lies the solution of every problem of private or public life, and that the only complete and satisfying human life is that of those who take Him as their Example and their Guide.

We may never rise to the heights of St. Paul, who could say that Christ lived in him and that for him to live was Christ ; we may continually fall below the

8 CHRIST IN THE COMMON WAYS OF LIFE

standards which He set ; we may fail Him again and again. But we can at least aim high, making His character the ideal for which we strive and attempting to apply His teaching to our lives. That, and nothing short of it, is what we mean by believing in Jesus Christ.

CHAPTER II

THE TEACHER AND HIS METHODS

WE have seen that faith in Jesus Christ means the wholehearted acceptance of His teaching as the rule of life. This is the foundation of the Christian profession, and those who cannot go so far, even though they were baptised in infancy and thereby made members of the Christian Society, can hardly claim the name of Christian. Technically they may be unable to renounce their membership, but in practice they repudiate it, deliberately and of their own consent disavowing the promises and vows once made on their behalf.

We now go on to ask what it was that Jesus demanded of His followers, what being a Christian here and now entails. We can hardly read a page of the Gospels without realising that He expected far more of them than mere respectability. He spoke of self-denial, of taking up the Cross, of being hated of all men for His sake, and at first His followers took their Master literally. The vitality of the early Church was largely due to the fact that to be a Christian then meant to be separate from the world. Christianity in its earliest days stood for something distinctive ; Christians were different from other men ; they followed standards which the world did not accept, and from that fact arose both their unpopularity and their strength. It was inevitable that it should be so ; the contrast between the principles

adopted by the world and the principles laid down by Jesus Christ was so great that Christians, if they were in any degree consistent, were bound to be marked men, their light could not be hid.

But a great change has taken place since those early days. Both the Church and the world have moved to meet one another. On the one hand civilised society has to a large extent been pervaded by the Christian atmosphere; without becoming Christian it has superficially at least been Christianised. And on the other hand the Church has in many directions compromised with the world. It has not apostatized, but much of the distinctiveness of early days has disappeared. The result is that to-day in the ordinary affairs of life there is not much difference to be seen between a professing Christian and any other respectable member of society. On Sundays the one will be found at Church, the other on the golf course, but on week-days there is little difference to be detected in their respective attitudes towards life. Outwardly at least their codes of behaviour seem the same.

But when we turn back to the Gospels we find that Jesus expected His followers to be different from their fellows. He set up standards very unlike the standards of the world and demanded that His disciples should rise to them. His attitude was one of detachment from the values accepted by ordinary men, and He believed that amongst ordinary men there would be found some with sufficient courage to adopt it. So long as His followers did not disappoint Him of His hope, the Church was a force with which the world was bound to reckon, and it is not until professing Christians recapture some measure of the distinctive spirit which was so strong in early days that the Church will regain the vitality which

marked its beginnings. And so we come back to the point from which we began. Faith in Christ means accepting and practising the principles for which He lived and died. We shall see in the chapters which follow something of what He taught and try to apply His teaching to the circumstances of modern life. But first it may help us to consider briefly the methods which He employed in the delivery of His message.

The first thing to take note of is the simplicity of His teaching. One weakness of most religious systems is that they are far too complicated and elaborate. It is perhaps too much to expect that religion should be so simple that children should learn it by instinct as they learn to walk. Some kind of religious instruction must always be necessary. But when we find a religion which needs professional interpreters to make it intelligible to plain men, we have probably found a religion which has lost its vitality and its power to inspire. Such a condition usually implies that its leaders have come to regard it as a theological system rather than a way of life. This was the type of religion prevailing amongst the Jews when Jesus began to teach. He found a highly organised system, hedged in by an infinite number of rules and regulations, which needed a trained hierarchy of experts to expound them, and which had little bearing upon the ethics of daily life. A religious Jew might be a very good Churchman, but a very poor neighbour; he might be versed in all the intricacies of the Law and yet be ignorant of the very elements of human relationship.

Into such an atmosphere the teaching of Jesus came like a breath of fresh air. He taught a religion which the simplest man could understand. His school was set up not in the lecture hall, but on the hill-side or in the village street. There are, it is true, a few isolated sayings

which are hard to understand, but they only emphasise the lucidity of His teaching as a whole and, in some cases at least, may be ascribed to the mistakes of those who reported what He said. Generally speaking His teaching was so plain and simple that a child could understand it. It was this amongst other things which startled and disgusted His opponents. "Have any of the rulers or the Pharisees believed on Him?" they asked. "But this multitude which knoweth not the Law are accursed." To them it was unthinkable that an unlettered layman from an obscure town in Galilee should presume to teach religion. That was a task for men like themselves, learned in the Law, who had graduated in the theological schools of the Rabbis and had the authority of the Church behind them.

But this was not the view of Jesus. To Him religion was a far simpler thing, so simple that unless a man became like a little child he could not understand it. Theology might need a clever brain; religion demanded a purity of heart which simple peasants were more likely to possess than learned Rabbis. Religion was just the art of loving God and your fellow-men, an art more readily to be acquired in the school of life than in libraries or classrooms.

And alongside of the simplicity of His teaching went the restraint of the methods He employed. We should naturally assume that One Who had come to set on foot a great revival of religion would seek to carry out His work with the maximum of publicity. He had come to teach men new truths about God and to set before them new ideals of human life. He would surely then employ some dramatic means of impressing Himself and His message upon the world. This was the method adopted by His great forerunner and by many leaders of religion

since His day. John Baptist was a revivalist pure and simple, and he did not shrink from a good deal of sensationalism. His sudden appearance in the deserts not far from Jerusalem, his uncouth manners of life and dress, his vigorous denunciations, caused a stir and an excitement which ensured attention to his message. Thousands flocked out from Jerusalem to see and hear him. He was a nine days' wonder and for a time created a sensation about which all the town was talking.

It is clear from the Temptation story that similar methods presented themselves to the mind of Christ, but only to be rejected. It was not upon such foundations that His Kingdom could be built. He knew what was in man and recognised that a movement which was to last and be strong must grow quietly and out of sight. Sensational methods might touch men's emotions and produce a rapid harvest, but, as with the seed sown on stony ground, it was a harvest which would wither as quickly as it had grown. His mission was to permeate the consciousness of men with a sense of God and with the vision of a world in harmony with Him, and this could best be done not by dramatic methods which caught the eye, but by simple talks with little groups of men and women and still more by the simple living of the perfect life.

And so He chose the villages among the hills of Galilee rather than the crowded streets of Jerusalem as the chief scene of His work ; He shunned rather than courted crowds ; He refused to use His divine powers as a bait to attract the curious. Numbers never meant much to Him and He was happier perhaps when talking with an individual than when addressing a mass of men. Far more of His time than most of us realise was devoted to the training of the little company of friends who were

to continue His work when He was gone. And when He found that in spite of Himself He had become too popular and that the people wished to make Him King, He moved away with the Twelve up to the North, beyond the boundaries of Palestine. It is true that from time to time we find Him in Jerusalem, but He seems never to have stayed there long. It was, we feel, with a sense of relief that He left the town behind Him and made His way back to the country districts where He felt at home.

It was this quietness of method, this refusal to plunge into the heart of things which were, partly at least, the cause of the Baptist's doubts about Him. "Art Thou He that should come, or do we look for another?" he asked. Surely Messiah, when He appears, will do His work in a more dramatic and arresting way than this. It cannot be that He will be content to spend His time amongst the simple country folk, while the crowded city is waiting for His message. He will surely set Himself at the head of a great movement which will sweep away the abuses of the day and set up God's standard at the heart of the nation's life. His brethren felt the same, though in their case it was a taunt rather than an appeal which underlay their challenge. "Come to Jerusalem," they urged; "there is no man that doeth anything in secret and himself seeketh to be known openly."

But neither the appeal of John nor the taunts of His brethren had any power to turn Jesus from His purpose. In the lonely quietness of the Judæan hills before His work began He had mapped out its course and to that course He steadfastly adhered. Only when He knew that His life was drawing to its close and that the end could not be far away does He seem to change His methods. During the last six months we find Him in

Jerusalem more often ; for the first time in His life He seems deliberately to seek the crowds. And it was of set purpose that He did so. The seed which was to bear so rich a harvest had been sown, the foundations of a world-wide Kingdom had been surely laid, the work which God had given Him to do was almost finished. Now He goes forward to meet the conflict which was to bring Him to the Cross.

In considering the methods employed by Christ it is natural that we should say something on the subject of His intercourse with God, though here we are treading upon far more difficult and mysterious ground. That worship was the supreme reality of His life goes without saying ; it was the atmosphere in which He lived. But in this as in other things quietness and simplicity seem to have been His ideals. The formal and elaborate worship of the Temple made little appeal to Him. That He went to Jerusalem for the great Feasts we know, but the records of His teaching have little to say about ceremonial or liturgy. He had a vision of what the Temple ought to be, but what He found there was far removed from His ideal. " My House is a house of prayer " suggests an atmosphere of quiet devotion rather than crowded services, and the one parable which has its scene in the Temple tells of two men who went there to say their private prayers. It is admittedly dangerous to rely upon the argument from silence and we must not press the point too far. Moreover, it may well be argued that the formal worship of His day was on a low level, with little of true spirituality in it and was therefore unlikely to appeal to Christ. And yet, allowing for all this, we still find it difficult to believe that ritual and ceremonial attracted Him. There was a simplicity and spontaneity about His attitude towards God which does

not somehow consort with conventional services. The sense of God's presence at all times and in all places was so intensely real to Him, that He needed no forms of worship in which to approach the Father.

The last point to be touched upon in this chapter is His attitude towards the organisation of religion. We have the germ and nucleus of institutional religion in His choosing of the Twelve to be the leaders of the Society in and through which His Spirit was to work in the years to come. Without such a Society it is inconceivable that Christianity could have lived. But in the machinery of religion He seems to have felt little interest. He relied upon personality, His own and that of His followers, for the building of the Kingdom. It is through personalities rather than organisations that God's Spirit works ; it is through the influence of individual men and women in whom Christ dwells that His Kingdom grows. And so we find no attempt on His part to establish groups of believers in this place or that, no careful framing of rules and regulations for the future. All this was to come, as it was inevitable that it should come. His task and passion were to convert men and women, that they in turn might convert their brethren. They would be guided in due time in the ordering of the Church. His mission was to give men life, not the machinery which too often chokes and destroys it.

Such, baldly and simply stated, were the characteristics which marked the ministry of Christ. How different it all is from Christianity as we know it to-day. It is a far cry from our libraries of Christian theology to the young Teacher on the hill-side, from the stately ceremonial of Christian worship to Jesus teaching His friends to say "Our Father," from the endless round of Conferences and Committees to the simple talks beneath the stars

when the day's work was done. The developments which have taken place were for the most part inevitable. If Christianity was to win the world it was bound to come out of the lanes and by-ways into the busier haunts of men, and as it came was bound to lose much of the quiet simplicity which marked its birth. Faced with the philosophies of the ancient world it was forced to develop a philosophy of its own, and as it did so Christian theology was slowly hammered out. Compelled to compete with religions older than itself it was bound in some measure to adopt the methods of the world, and so the aloofness of the early days was lost. Inevitably the recognition that its Founder was divine led to a systematic order of worship and adoration, and thus the ceremonial and ritual of the Church evolved itself. The expansion and spread of Christianity throughout the world demanded regulation and control, and so the machinery and organisation which threaten sometimes to overwhelm our spiritual life grew up. These things were in a sense essential and inevitable, but it is well sometimes to get beneath them. It is well to remind ourselves of the simple beginnings from which our religion sprang, to gain a vision of the young Teacher speaking to His friends, and to seek in quietness to hear what He would say to us.

We may be indifferent theologians, ceremonial may make little appeal to us, organisations and committees may leave us cold, but if deep down in our hearts we feel that the Carpenter of Nazareth is the most splendid and heroic figure that the world has known, if we can see in Him some vision of the eternal, invisible Power that rules the world, if we can feel, however faintly, the impulse and inspiration of His Spirit, then in spite of all that is defective in us, we may rightly claim the proudest name to which man can aspire, the name of Christian.

It is good for us sometimes to remember the words spoken over us when we were made members of the Church of Christ : " He shall not be ashamed to confess the faith of Christ crucified ; he shall fight manfully under His banner ; he shall continue Christ's faithful soldier and servant unto his life's end." Could the essential meaning of Christianity be more clearly or emphatically defined ? What has been our response to the challenge ? Can we in any sense echo the words which a poet has put upon the lips of one of the greatest Christians of all time ?

Yea, thro' life, death, thro' sorrow and thro' sinning
 He shall suffice me for He hath sufficed :
 Christ is the end for Christ was the beginning,
 Christ the beginning for the end is Christ.

CHAPTER III

THE FIRST AND GREAT COMMANDMENT.

WE have glanced briefly in the last chapter at the methods employed by Jesus in the delivery of His message. Now we turn to the message itself. What was the content of His teaching? What were the things upon which He laid most stress? It is essential that we should put first things first and avoid the mistake of tithing mint and cummin, while we neglect the weightier matters of the law. If the big things are right, the details will follow in their place. But if we are mainly concerned with little things, it may be that fundamentals will be lost sight of altogether. A lack of proportion is one of the commonest failings amongst religious people; we are often so concerned with the minutiae of religion that we allow them to blind us to what matters most. It was in this that Pharisaism was at fault and we have still much to learn from its mistakes.

We need hardly ask what was the truth upon which Jesus laid most stress. With Him, as with all religious teachers before and after Him, man's attitude towards God was of the first importance. What a man thinks about God determines all his thoughts and actions, and creates the atmosphere in which his whole life is lived. Theoretically we should most of us assent to that view of life, but in practice I wonder how many think seriously about God at all. It is worth our while to ask ourselves

how often on a normal day the thought of God enters our minds between our morning and our evening prayers. I remember once hearing an address in which the speaker asked us to consider what difference it would make to us if we opened our papers one morning to find that it had been discovered beyond the shadow of a doubt that God did not exist, that all man's supposed experience of Him had been an illusion and everything that men had said about Him was an empty dream. What difference would it make to you, the speaker asked us, if it were proved, finally and conclusively, that there is no God?

It was, if you like, a crude way of putting it, but it made one think. How would my life be affected if I woke up to-morrow morning to find that God was gone? What difference would it make to my friends, the people I meet in business or at social functions? How would the work of the world be affected, what changes should we see? Is it too pessimistic to suggest that to the great majority of people, including many who are professedly religious, it would make little practical difference of any kind? For a time, no doubt, they would feel the lack of something with which they are familiar. The Churches would be closed, Sunday would cease to be observed even to the limited extent which obtains to-day, habits of prayer which have lingered would be given up. But before long most people would become accustomed to the new conditions. To a minority the world and life would cease to have any meaning, but to the mass they would not be very different from what they are to-day.

To the majority, in other words, the fact of God is an abstraction which has never held a central place in their minds. He has been kept on the circumference of their lives, seldom touching them very nearly, and the

loss of Him would not affect them in any vital way. But for those who have accepted the teaching of Jesus Christ God is the one reality which matters more than anything else in the world. He is the vital centre in Whom all things live and move and have their beings, and their whole experience of life is coloured and conditioned by their faith in Him. This is what God was to Jesus and this is how He taught His followers to think of Him. There is no event, from the outbreak of a world-shattering war to the falling of a sparrow from its nest, which happens without His knowledge and about which He does not care. There is nothing that we do, from the first conscious moment of our life until the end comes, with which He is not concerned.

In the teaching of Jesus, then, God comes absolutely first. That goes without saying and there was nothing new in the emphasis He laid upon the importance of a right attitude towards Him. What was new in His teaching was His insistence that love is the primary duty of man towards His Maker. Before obedience or reverence or fear He put love. Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart and with all thy strength and with all thy mind, this is the first and great commandment. How familiar the language is, how easily it slips off the tongue, but how infinitely difficult to practise what we talk about. How can we love One Whom we have never seen and Whom it is increasingly difficult to visualise as our knowledge of the vastness of the universe increases year by year.

It was comparatively easy, or so we think, to love God when the universe was thought of in terms of our little world, and God was the benevolent Ruler, seated on a throne in a material heaven and mainly concerned with the affairs of the world in which we live. But modern

knowledge has destroyed this simple faith. To-day when we are gaining glimpses of the immeasurable vastness of the universe, in which our earth is hardly larger than a speck of dust, our whole conception of what God is has been profoundly modified. The wonder of His power, the mystery of His being are infinitely beyond the capacity of the human mind to conceive. How can we think of such a Personality in terms of love? A man may love the hills beneath whose shadow he was born and grew to manhood. They belong to him and he to them; they have been part of his life as far back as he can remember. But Mount Everest, Mont Blanc, the Matterhorn, let him live in their shadow, and it is not love and affection that they will evoke. Awe, reverence, wonder, fear—these are the emotions which such giants call out; they are too vast and too remote to love.

Is not this what we are bound to feel about God to-day? Does it not seem like playing with words to speak of loving One Whose Majesty is so stupendous, Whose Power so over-powering? There are, no doubt, those who can rise above the difficulty of which I have spoken, who have so great an assurance of God's love for them that almost instinctively they love Him in return. Their very sense of His greatness only increases their sense of His condescension and compels their love. But such souls are rare and for most of us the difficulty is very real. And yet it must have a solution; there must be some path by which we ordinary folk can win our way to loving God. To think otherwise is to deny the truth of the most fundamental teaching of Jesus Christ.

In what follows I am frankly dealing with the subject in a quite elementary way. The suggestions which I have to make will naturally not appeal to those who

feel no difficulty in loving God. It is only because I feel certain that there are very many earnest men and women who find it really hard to obey the first commandment of Our Lord that I venture to suggest two ways in which I believe that they may at least begin to obey it.

In the first place let them remember that, remote and unapproachable as God may seem, He reveals something of Himself to man by sacramental means. We have most of us some dim recollection of the definition of a Sacrament given us in the Catechism. We were taught at the time of our Confirmation that a Sacrament is "an outward and visible sign of an inward and visible grace." The Catechism then goes on to deal in detail with the two great Sacraments ordained by Christ, and it is probable that many of us have, therefore, thought that the term is to be applied only to Baptism and the Holy Communion. But, in fact, the whole of life is saturated with the sacramental principle, for spiritual realities, which can only be expressed through material means, are constantly being conveyed to our senses by outward and visible signs. The kiss is the sacrament of love, the handshake of friendship, the bowing of the head or knee of reverence and respect. Every one of us continually makes use of these and similar sacramental forms to express to our fellows spiritual feelings which without such forms would remain hidden within our own consciousness. It is hardly too much to say that we know nothing of one another except sacramentally, for the true life of each of us is a spiritual, invisible thing, locked up within our own breasts.

In making use of such a method to express ourselves we are but following the example of Him Who, remote and invisible as He is, has filled the world with sacraments

of His Nature. As St. Paul wrote to the Christians of Rome, "the invisible things of God are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made." Turn where we will we are met by outward and visible signs of the goodness, truth and beauty which are in God, and as our hearts thrill with delight when we perceive them, we are at least beginning to love Him Who is their Source and Author, and of Whose Nature they are gleams and glimpses, faint and far descried. In one of the most beautiful Collects in the Prayer Book we are taught to pray that God will pour into our hearts such love towards Him that we may love Him above all things. In the Latin original there are some words which were strangely and most regrettably omitted when the prayer was translated. In its first form the Collect prayed that we might love God "*in all things* and above all things." I have always felt that the words which I have italicized contain a valuable truth and that their omission in our English version is a real loss.

There are, as I have said, many to whom the exhortation to love God presents a genuine difficulty, but who are in effect unconsciously loving Him in the joy they feel when they meet with one or another of those sacramental revelations of His Nature of which the world is full. Brother Lawrence tells us that His conversion to a sense of God was due to the sight of a bare and leafless tree in winter and the reflection that in a few weeks' time that seemingly lifeless object would be clothed in a garment of fresh, green leaves. The change that was to take place spoke to him of the creative power of God, and inspired him with a sense of the beauty of the Divine Mind which gives life and breath to all things. Such intuition may be too subtle for more ordinary men, but there are few of us who are not inspired by the more

obvious beauties of the world. The stars on a summer's night, the view from a mountain top, the woods in autumn, the raging of a winter's storm, these and a hundred visions like them touch a chord deep down in our nature of which we seldom speak even to our nearest friends. For the moment at least they lift us above ourselves and the drab level of our ordinary life. We know with certainty that it is for beauty and not for ugliness, for grandeur and not for littleness that man was made. The vision fades, but while it lasts it is real and compelling. Surely we may say that the delight which most men feel in the face of the beauty of the world is in its essence akin to love for God, and that as we train and develop our delight in all things beautiful we are, it may be without our knowing it, fostering a love for Him in Whose mind all that is beautiful has its birth.

But we may go further along the same line, for Nature is not the final nor the chief expression of the Mind of God. If, as Christianity teaches, God is personal, it must be that He will most readily and completely reveal Himself through human personalities. Man is made in the likeness of His Maker and is therefore the most natural channel through which God can make Himself known to men. It is true that human depravity and the absorption of man in material things has blunted the fine edge of his spiritual nature and spoiled his capacity for acting as a vehicle of the divine. But even so there is to be found in the most unlikely characters some tiny power of revealing God and making His goodness and beauty intelligible to other men. Hardly a day passes but those whose eyes are open gain some glimpse of God in the lives of their fellow men. The laughter of children as they dance and play in some mean street is a faint echo of the joy of God. The story of some act of unselfish

heroism, performed it may be out of sight and with no eye to honour or reward, is a reflection of God's eternal giving of Himself to man. The painting of a Raphael, the music of a Beethoven lift just a corner of the veil which hangs between the worlds. Only those who are utterly immersed in material affairs, utterly devoted to self and its interests can fail to respond to these intimations of the divine which are to be met with in the common ways of life. But those whose eyes are open rejoice in the joy and goodness and beauty of which human nature, with all its limitations, is yet capable. They love the highest when they see it and in loving it are surely loving God, Who reveals Himself in all that is best and most beautiful in human life. The hearts of some men are so gross, their ears so heavy that they can neither hear nor perceive the signs of God's presence in the world. But those who train themselves to see the best and not the worst in other men will come by degrees to know that God is in this place and knowing Him to love Him.

God speaks to us to-day, as He did to our fathers, at sundry times and in divers manners; He gives us glimpses of Himself through Nature and through man. But the one complete and final revelation of Himself was given to the world in the Person of Jesus Christ, Who alone of all that have ever lived could say, "He that hath seen Me hath seen the Father." In His character we see in its fullness the beauty, truth and goodness which are in God; through Him the divine Spirit shone forth with undimmed clearness. In Jesus we see what God is like. And so it is through loving Him that we learn most truly to love God. If, as we read the story of His life, He seems to be most lovable; if we can understand something of the attractiveness which endeared Him to His friends; if we are inspired

by the self-less devotion which marked His every action ; if in a word we can truly say I love Him, we are loving God, for what He was God is.

Here then is one path by which we may advance towards that love of God which Jesus asked of His disciples. To love Him in Himself may seem too difficult, but to love Him in the revelations of Himself which He has given to the world is not only not so difficult, but something which most of us have already learned to do.

CHAPTER IV

THE OFFERING OF SELF

WE have been considering one way of learning the A.B.C. of loving God. Now we approach the subject from the other end. Granted that our love for God must take its beginning from His revelation of Himself through nature, through the life of man and, above all, through Jesus Christ, it is none the less true that we can foster and strengthen it by our own action. It is a commonplace that we develop any function of mind or body by setting it to work. Our brains grow keener as we make use of them, our muscles gain strength as we exercise them. Whatever part of us is allowed to remain idle quickly atrophies and decays. Our emotions are a case in point. If we fail to express them, they soon lose whatever force they had. If our emotions of pity and sympathy are stirred by some tale of suffering, and we take no steps to give vent to them by trying to alleviate the suffering, the emotions will be less strong when the next misfortune comes our way. It was for this reason that Plato banned the theatre from his ideal state. Stage tragedies, he maintained, arouse emotions of pity which, because the tragedy is make-believe, can never be expressed in action and are therefore definitely harmful, in that they weaken the spectator's capacity to sympathise with real tragedies when he meets them. But, on the other hand, whenever we act upon an emotion which

we have felt and give some concrete expression to it, we have strengthened our power to feel a similar emotion in the future. Those who have learned to give know that their joy in giving grows with the exercise of charity, and that it becomes a real happiness to share what they have with others, even at the cost of some self-sacrifice. Only those who refuse to obey the dictates of their hearts and allow prudence to overmaster their natural generosity find it hard to give.

This is especially true in the realm of love. The more we do for those we love, the more we love them. There is, no doubt, a passive love aroused by gratitude for favours which we have received from those who love us. Perhaps that is the beginning of love with most of us ; we love others because they have first loved us. But a love which stops there and is content to be merely passive is never likely to be strong. It is only active love which grows. The mother loves most the child for whom she has done most ; the son never loves his father so much as when in the latter's old age he is, for the first time perhaps, able to minister to him ; the husband's love for his wife and the wife's love for her husband increase as each feels that the other needs what he or she can give and rejoice in giving. As Browning tells us, Love's strength stands in love's sacrifice, and where there is no sacrifice, no offering of the self for others, love has little strength.

All this is as true of our love for God as of our love for one another. The reason why many feel their love for Him to be weak and unreal is that they so seldom exercise it. I am not forgetting the difficulties to which I referred in the last chapter, but I am thinking now of those who have made some small beginning in the art of loving God, and yet are conscious that their love for

Him is a poor and fitful thing. It can be evoked from time to time by some revelation of Himself, but it seldom lasts and it never seems to grow in strength. It is only an emotion aroused by some favourable circumstance, it fails to get its roots down into the will.

I am sure that if we more often tried to express our love for God in action, we should find it becoming a stronger and more central thing in our lives. If we set ourselves to do things for the love of God, we should find that we love Him more really because we have done them. The measure of what we give to Him will be the measure of our love towards Him.

What is there that we can give to God as an expression of our love and as a means whereby it will grow stronger? We shall find an answer to the question in the prayer in the Holy Communion Service which comes immediately after the administration. In that prayer we profess to "offer ourselves, our souls and bodies" to God. We are reminded by those words that there is a twofold gift to be made to Him, one purely spiritual, the other of a more material kind. The spiritual gift will take the form of worship, the material will be expressed in service.

In an earlier chapter it was suggested that formal worship made little appeal to Jesus Christ. God was so real to Him that He felt no need of special times and places in His approach to the Father. He could worship best alone on the hill-side with no material accessories to help His prayer. But it is not so with us. Our spiritual life is on so infinitely lower a level, our sense of God's presence is so far less acute, that we need the assistance that outward things can give us in order to make our worship real. It ought not to be so; St. John, in the Revelation, tells us that it will not always be so. When we pass on into the spiritual world we shall find no

Temple there. The presence of God will so pervade the atmosphere that we shall worship as naturally as we breathe. But so long as we are in a material world we must make use of material media to help us to pray. This is the chief argument for Church going. Men often excuse themselves for their absence from Church on the grounds that they get nothing when they go there. But we should go to Church primarily to give and not to get, to worship God and not to have our religious emotions stirred. The services of the Church would gain enormously in life and reality if the members of every congregation came together with the deliberate intention of making an offering of worship to Almighty God. It is easy to make the excuse that we can worship as well out in the open air, but it is seldom true. The special building with its religious associations, the presence of our fellow-worshippers, the music, the ceremonial, be it elaborate or simple, all help to create an atmosphere other than that of our ordinary lives and for that reason conducive to a sense of God. There are some who are most helped by a highly developed ceremonial, others can pray best amidst the simplest surroundings, but all of us need to be taken apart from the daily round in order that we may worship God. It is only the very few who are likely to maintain the practice of worship if they give up going to Church. For most of us it is sheer hypocrisy to pretend that we can worship best outside. And if worship goes, we are not only failing in the most elementary of Christian duties, but we are letting slip something which will keep God always before our eyes and strengthen our little love for Him.

Worship is one means whereby we can make an offering to God, but it is not the only means. From the earliest days one of the great dangers of organised religion has

been the divorce of worship from life. It is fatally easy to establish a cult of worship, to become so absorbed in the correctness of ceremonial as to lose sight of its twin sister, service. It was against this that the Prophets constantly inveighed. "To what purpose is the multitude of your sacrifices unto me? saith the Lord. I am full of the burnt offerings of rams and the fat of fed beasts. . . . Bring no more vain oblations; incense is an abomination unto me; your new moons and your appointed feasts my soul hateth; they are a trouble unto me, I am weary to bear them. And when ye spread forth your hands I will hide mine eyes from you. Yea, when ye make many prayers I will not hear. Wash you, make you clean; put away the evil of your doings from before mine eyes. Cease to do evil, learn to do well, seek judgment, relieve the oppressed, judge the fatherless, plead for the widow."

The scorching denunciations with which Isaiah rebuked the inconsistencies of those who worshipped God in his day may seem to have little application to Christian congregations in the twentieth century. But there are still too many who think that they have fulfilled their duty to God when they have offered to Him only half of what He asks of them. By the one-sidedness of their religion they are dishonouring God, hindering the growth of their own spiritual life and casting a stumbling block in the way of many of their fellows. If service is not allied to worship we are in danger of the condemnation pronounced against those who honour God with their lips while their heart is far from Him.

He asks of us then that, while we offer Him the best and purest worship of which we are capable, we should set alongside of it the service of our daily lives. In doing so we shall grow in love towards Him; for, as we have

already seen, love grows stronger in proportion as it is expressed in action. How can we serve God best? In the first place, without doubt, by the training and discipline of our own characters. In the words of Robert Louis Stevenson, "My work is not to make other people good; my work is to make myself good and other people happy." We shall return to this aspect of the Christian life in later chapters, so we will not dwell upon it now. But there are very many of us who need to be reminded that the offering of a Christlike character is, even before the offering of our worship, what God demands of us. There are too many who are so engrossed in helping others that they have no time to pay attention to themselves. St. Paul himself was on his guard lest, having preached to others, he should become a castaway. Many of us would do well to take his warning to ourselves.

But we must not become too absorbed in the care of our own souls. That was, perhaps, one of the failings of religious people in the last century. They were so intent upon personal religion that they laid themselves open to the charge of spiritual selfishness. They acted as though the salvation of their souls was the beginning and the end of Christianity. There were, of course, notable exceptions; the work of the Missionary Societies is sufficient proof of that. But, comparatively speaking, it was the few who supported them and the kindred organisations which were at work in the slums of our own cities. The mass of Christians in those days regarded religion from an individual standpoint. There was little enthusiasm for the Kingdom of God in the widest sense and almost none for the Kingdom as it touched the material side of life. Lord Shaftesbury and the early Christian Socialists could give us plenty of evidence on that point.

One of the new truths which has come home to the present generation is that God is concerned with the whole of life and not only with that part of it, which, by a false distinction, we call the spiritual. We see more clearly than our fathers did that it is impossible to separate soul from body, spiritual from material, and shut them up in water-tight compartments. Distinct they may be, but they continually act and re-act upon one another, so that it is almost impossible to say where material ends and spiritual begins. And God's Kingdom covers both, His will touches the whole of life, in His sight nothing is common or unclean. It follows that our duty towards God is not confined to the training of our own characters and the salvation of our own souls. It is hardly too much to say that these things are a means to an end. We are saved to serve, we are to become like Christ because that is the only way in which we can help to build God's Kingdom in the world. This, some would say, is the supreme offering that we have to make, greater than the offering of our worship, greater than the offering of ourselves, is the offering of the work which we can do as builders of God's Kingdom.

Sunday by Sunday, day by day, we pray the familiar prayer, Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done, in earth as it is in Heaven. It is something like hypocrisy to say the words, if we are doing nothing to make them come true. When Jesus taught His followers to utter those petitions, He must have meant something by them. He must have believed that it was at least possible that God's Kingdom should be established in the world, that at long last men would learn that the happiness and safety of the human race could only be secured by the doing of God's will. He must have believed that the chief task to which His Church would set itself would be the establishment

of that Kingdom, the realisation of that will. What has been our contribution towards this end? Is it not true of most of us that, while we have not actually hindered the coming of the Kingdom, we have done little to bring it nearer? What can we point to in the past twelve months which has helped it forward? Are we not bound to confess that our discipleship of Jesus Christ has been a passive rather than an active thing, that we have struck few blows against His enemies, made little deliberate effort on His behalf?

If that is our record, we have not only failed Him; we have also failed ourselves. We saw that loving God is the first thing which Christ asks of us, that unless we are trying to love God we cannot claim the name of Christian. And we have seen that love, like every other emotion, can only grow if it is expressed in action. The strongest love is that which finds an outlet in the making of some offering to the object of our love. There is a threefold offering which man may make to God, the offering of his worship, the offering of his character, and the offering of his service. We offer and present to Thee, O Lord, ourselves, our souls and bodies, to be a reasonable, holy and lively sacrifice unto Thee. And as in the common round of daily life we strive to make our offering more real, more genuinely a part of ourselves, we shall surely find that the faint beginnings of love for God which arise from our sense of His love and goodness towards us, gain strength and reality. We love Him first because He first loved us; we love Him most because He condescends to accept our offerings and permits us to be fellow-workers with Him in the building of His Kingdom.

CHAPTER V

THE CHILDLIKE SPIRIT

WE have seen that in the teaching of Jesus, God comes absolutely first. He is the supreme reality which gives value and meaning to all the rest of life. The Christian may be defined as a man who is alive to God, who has learnt to see His presence everywhere, who is trying to live in harmony with His will and to play some small part in the building of His Kingdom. We must proceed, therefore, to ask ourselves what kind of character is required in those who desire to be fellow-workers with God and to make His service the main purpose of their lives.

There were two occasions upon which Jesus spoke of the qualities which made men great in the Kingdom of God. The first came a few days after the great Confession of St. Peter and the Transfiguration. The former of these events had proved that the main work of Jesus had been accomplished. His friends had come to realise what their Master was and could now be entrusted with the task of carrying on His work. It had been followed by a brief vision of the Lord in glory, which was to encourage them and confirm their faith in the difficult days which were to come. Soon after, they returned to Capernaum, from where they had been absent for many weeks.

They had learned the chief lesson, but they had still much to learn. On their homeward way an argument had sprung up amongst them as to who should be greatest in the Kingdom and when they reached Capernaum they put the question to Jesus, though He had guessed already what was in their minds. It may have been after supper in Peter's house, and a child was playing in the room. Jesus called the little one and putting His arm about him answered the question which they had asked Him. "Except ye become like little children," He replied, "ye shall not enter into the Kingdom of Heaven." It is a saying which is as true to-day as when He uttered it, and is in complete harmony with all His teaching. Those whose attitude to life is most like that of little children are the best Christians. It is natural that it should be so. Children are in some ways the nearest to God, because they have most lately come from God and their characters have not yet been contaminated by that contact with the world, which is only too successful in marring the innocence and simplicity which are ours when we are born.

Our birth is but a sleep and a forgetting ;
The soul that rises with us, our life's star,
Hath elsewhere had its setting
And cometh from afar.
Not in entire forgetfulness
And not in utter nakedness,
But trailing clouds of glory do we come
From God Who is our home.

It is true that the advanced Christian may by years of self-discipline and by the constant practice of the presence of God win his way to the Christlike character. But in so doing he will find that he is to a large extent returning to what he was at the beginning of his life, but has

ceased to be as the temptations and lowering influences of the world have had their way with him.

There are four characteristics of the childlike spirit which ought to be conspicuous in the Christian. In the first place we may put freedom from worry and anxiety. Children's troubles are like April showers ; they quickly come and are as quickly forgotten. Laughter soon follows tears. There is little brooding over past troubles, little anticipation of troubles to come. Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof is the motto of most children. The reason for this is plain enough. The child trusts his elders to provide for him. His parents are responsible for his welfare and so he can enjoy each day as it comes without anxiety about the next. This, Jesus taught us, is what the Christian ought to feel about His heavenly Father. If all His teaching about God was utterly mistaken, if life is chaos and there is no Providence which shapes our ends, then let us plan and scheme and worry to our hearts' content. It is doubtful whether we shall make a great success of life even so, but there will at least be some justification for our anxious care for the morrow. But if Jesus was right when He told us that even sparrows have a place in the mind of God and that the Father is concerned with the tiniest details of His children's lives, then we are only wasting effort and making ourselves miserable for nothing if we are for ever brooding about the future and anticipating troubles that may never come to pass. It was not fatalism that Jesus taught. What a man is and what he does have their part to play, and no small part either, in the making of his life. But worry never helps, and if we older folk cannot enjoy the entire irresponsibility of childhood, we can at least learn something from their trustfulness and be less anxious for the morrow.

The next point to notice in the childlike spirit is its idealism or, shall we say, its hopefulness. A child is always building castles in the air. Again and again the castles may prove to have no more consistency than soap bubbles, but he goes on building them. Disappointment after disappointment has no power to destroy his belief that there are better things in store. Children are never pessimists ; they believe in the essential goodness of things and people, and are instinctively certain that good will be the final goal of ill. This attitude towards life is fundamental in the teaching of Jesus. He was an idealist through and through and taught His followers to be the same. Had He not been so He would never have bid them to be perfect as God is perfect, or taught them to pray Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done. There was enough in the world of His day to discourage optimism, more in most ways than there is in the world we know. But in spite of it He never lost faith in human nature. He believed in man's power to rise, and those who share His spirit can never be guilty of the sin against the Holy Ghost which is committed by such as declare that human nature cannot change. The Christian, like his Master and like all children, must be an optimist.

And, again, the normal child is impervious to criticism. There is in his nature an almost complete lack of self-consciousness. He cares very little for what other people think or say about him. Living in a world of his own he tolerates but is little affected by grown-up people's judgments of what he does. He may even be a little contemptuous of what seems to him silly and mistaken in their view of life. This is in some ways a less pleasing trait in children. Grown-up people not unnaturally feel that their experience of life gives them the right to criticise and correct the faults of youth. But who will

say that there is not something in the child's indifference to what older people think. Granted that experience must have some weight, it may at least be argued that their very lack of experience of the world means that children are nearer to the heart of things than their elders can hope to be. Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God. Such purity is perhaps more really ours in childhood than in our later years. However that may be, one of the points upon which Jesus insisted was that His followers should be indifferent to popular judgments and to the world's disapproval of their actions. The self-conscious Christian, who is for ever asking himself what men are thinking of him, is almost a contradiction in terms. We are told of some who excluded themselves from the Kingdom because they loved the praise of men more than the praise of God. Blessed are ye, said Jesus, when men shall revile you and persecute you and say all manner of evil against you falsely for my sake. Rejoice and be exceeding glad, for great is your reward in heaven.

And finally there is a freshness and spontaneity in the childlike mind which Christians are to imitate. Children's minds never run in ruts ; they are ready for every kind of adventure and experiment. "That is not done," is a judgment which has no weight with them. One of the surest marks of adolescence is a tendency to yield to conventions, to be unwilling to do odd and unusual things. The prison bars begin to close about the growing boy and still more, perhaps, about the growing girl. We quickly become the slaves of fashion, and our tastes come to be dictated not by our natural preferences, but by the conventional judgments of the world. But the child is free as air to follow whatever may appeal to him at the moment. He is not even the slave of his own past ideas. Yesterday he was a Red Indian, to-day he is a pirate and

to-morrow he will cheerfully break with his whole past and become a grocer or an engine-driver. Conventionality, which is the prison house of freedom, is a vice from which most children are entirely free.

There is hardly anything upon which Jesus laid more stress than upon the danger of being enslaved to convention and traditions. He knew too well how easy it is for one good custom to corrupt the world. He had a living example of that truth in the hide-bound traditionalism of the Pharisees. And so He bade His followers ever to look forward, never to allow themselves to be the slaves of the past. New wine needs new bottles, it is ill work to patch old garments with new cloth. What was said to them of old time was right and good for those to whom it was first said. But it does not follow that it is equally right and good for those who came after them. He came to found a Kingdom, the builders of which must not be afraid to break with the past and must dare to make experiments. Their work would lead them into unknown and untravelled country, but they would not go alone. His Spirit would be with them, to guide and comfort them. The early Christians, led by so bold an adventurer as St. Paul, did not shrink from taking Jesus at His word. They incurred hatred, contempt and persecution, but they blazed the trail along which tens of thousands have travelled since their day.

That surely is something of what Jesus meant when He bade His disciples to cultivate the childlike spirit. Freedom from care, idealism, indifference to criticism, detachment from conventions, all play their part in making up the Christian temper. And all spring from a genuine trust in God ; the man to whom His Fatherhood is real can face life with a joyousness, a hopefulness, a carelessness of the opinion of the world, a courageous facing of

the future which are impossible for those who do not share his faith.

Do we find those qualities existing in ourselves or in most Christian men to-day? Is it not rather true that the spirit of middle age has captured the Church and expelled the childlike spirit? We were all children once, but the years have passed and for most of us childhood lies far behind, and not childhood only, but the childlike nature which is so dear to Christ. Worries and cares have lined our brows and soured our tempers. The ideals and visions which were once so strong are now counted as illusions, for we have long since ceased to hope that things or people will grow better than they are.

The enemy faints not nor faileth,
And as things have been they remain,

is the song of middle age. We have grown so anxious as to what our neighbours think of us that we hardly dare to be ourselves and, enslaved to convention and tradition, we have lost the spontaneity and adventurousness of childhood. The world, the flesh and the devil have had their way with us and transformed the children that we were into the men and women whom our friends see in us to-day.

It is this which has done more than anything else to destroy the freshness and attractiveness of Christianity, for it is hardly an exaggeration to say that Christ has no greater foes than those of His own household, the middle-aged Christians of whom the Church is full. Not until we take His saying literally and set ourselves to recover the spirit of childhood, both individually and in our corporate life, can we hope to see Christianity a living force. And recovered it can be, for the middle-

aged spirit has no necessary connection with the number of years we have lived in the world. It is true that it usually attacks us in the forties, from which it has gained its name, but some men are middle-aged at twenty-five while others remain children at heart long after they are white-headed. .

Christ told us to become like little children and we must try to obey Him. If we do so, our friends will mark the difference ; for the home, the office or the workshop which numbers amongst its members one truly childlike character knows the compelling and attractive force of such a nature. It is a source of joy to all who come within its influence, smoothing the troubles and wiping away the tears of life. It is by such that the Kingdom of Heaven will be built on earth, and it is such that will be set in the highest places in that Kingdom.

CHAPTER VI

THE SPIRIT OF SERVICE

THERE was another occasion upon which Jesus told His disciples what was essential to a high place in His Kingdom. It was shortly before the end, while they were travelling to Jerusalem for the last time. Oppressed by the thought of the suffering which lay before Him, Jesus had been telling His friends of the tragedy that was waiting for Him in the city. But their minds were full of other things and they entirely failed to grasp His meaning. Conflict and struggle they expected, but defeat and death were inconceivable. God could not fail His Servant, He would give them the victory, and then the Kingdom would be established in Jerusalem. And so once more an argument arose as to who should have the most honourable places in that Kingdom. There were angry looks and angrier words between them. We can picture the despair which Jesus must have felt at their blindness to the realities of the situation and their failure even now to understand the meaning of His teaching. But His patience was infinite and once more He set Himself to teach them the true nature of the Kingdom for which He was about to die, and the character of those who should be the leaders of it.

“He called them unto Him and saith unto them, Ye know that the princes of the Gentiles exercise dominion

over them and they that are great exercise authority among them. But it shall not be so among you ; but whosoever will be great among you let him be your minister and whosoever will be chief among you let him be your servant."

Would that this saying, together with the exhortation to become like little children, could be written large above the porch of every Christian Church, so that all who entered could plainly read the words of Christ. Between them they sum up all that He demanded of His followers in their relationships with the world and with their fellow-men. That we should have the mind of children and the mind of servants is what Jesus asks of us. We have seen something of what the former means, let us consider now what is implied by Christian service.

It means in the first place far more than being kind and charitable in the modern sense of charity. Philanthropy is a conspicuous Christian duty, but it is not the same as service. The truth is that we have become so accustomed to watering down the teaching of our Lord and accommodating His commands to our own convenience that we have almost lost the power of understanding the plain meaning of His language. We have only to turn over the pages of the Gospels to realise how few there are who attempt to take His sayings literally. He calls us to take up our Cross and follow Him, and we interpret His appeal in terms of attendance at an early Service once a week or of giving up some small luxury in Lent. He bids us love our enemies, and we think that we have obeyed Him if we abstain from active hatred of those who wrong us. He warns us to judge not that we be not judged, and we spend many an hour in idle gossip over the failings of our friends. In these and other matters we have assimilated the teaching of Jesus

to our standards, instead of raising our standards to the level of His teaching.

And so with service, which He taught to be one of the fundamental Christian duties. We have persuaded ourselves that to be charitable, to help those who are weaker than ourselves, to take an interest in the poor, is to fulfil His command. These things are indeed our bounden duty, but they fall far short of what He meant by service. At their best they are only its outward and visible signs, at their worst they may have nothing of its spirit in them. It is quite possible to give of our superfluity to help the poor, to be lavish of advice to those whom in our hearts we despise for their weakness and incompetence, to be constant in attendance at the meetings of societies engaged in social and philanthropic work, it is possible to devote a great part of our lives to such activities and yet to be totally lacking in what Jesus meant when He said that the Christian must be the servant of his fellow-men. For service consists not so much in what we do as in the spirit in which we do it. St. Paul made that clear when he warned the Corinthians that they might give all their goods to feed the poor and their own bodies to be burned, but that, if the right spirit was lacking, neither the one offering nor the other would profit them.

Many of us will remember the processions of unemployed which paraded the streets of London at the beginning of this century with the slogan, "We want justice, not charity" emblazoned on their banners. They were regarded by some who watched them as giving proof of the base ingratitude of the poor. "Have we not subscribed our guineas and our five-pound notes," they asked, "to save these people from starvation? Have we not established soup kitchens and wood-chopping yards

to help keep the wolf from their doors? And now they cast our kindness in our teeth." Such criticism was sincere and the outcome of honest indignation, but it showed how superficially those who made it were considering the problem. I wonder whether Christ would not say to some who profess to be acting in His name to-day, "I know you not; it is service and not charity that I asked of you. These things indeed you should have done, but not have left the greater thing undone."

We must recognise, then, in the first place, that in the mind of Jesus service was something that goes down to the roots of man's character; it is a vital part of his whole attitude towards life. But if on the one hand we must beware of emasculating the Master's teaching, we must be careful, on the other, not to read into it more than it really means. It is quite possible by exaggeration to produce what is not far removed from a parody of what He taught, and by so doing to make His teaching so unpractical as to give good grounds for the assertion that it is impossible to be a Christian. It goes without saying that humility is essential to service. Only the humble can truly serve. But it is important to define humility correctly. There is a false humility, such as is caricatured by Dickens in *Uriah Heap*, which is utterly unlike the humility which Jesus practised and enjoined. Humility is not synonymous with self-depreciation. The man of a humble spirit is not the man who denies that he has any gifts or talents, nor is he one who cringes before arrogance and brute force. We can be truly humble while we recognise the gifts and talents with which we are endowed, and while we are resolute in opposing the pretensions of the proud. If it were not so, be it said with reverence, Jesus Himself could not be called humble, for He was fully conscious of the powers within Him

and He never failed to denounce cruelty and oppression when He met them. And yet He bade men learn of Him, for He was meek and lowly of heart, and told them that He was among them as one that served.

What was it then that service meant for Him? What was the spirit which He looked for in His followers? We can answer the question best by studying His own character and marking how His whole life was one of service. Note first that He mixed freely with people of every kind. It is the common practice for the leader, whether in religion or politics or in any other sphere of life, to keep himself aloof from and above the crowd. By so doing he thinks to preserve his dignity and to increase his authority over the mass of men. He admits few, and those carefully chosen, to intimacy; the common people can only know him from a distance. It was not so with Jesus; He had no false pride, no fear of losing caste by making Himself too readily accessible. He was at home amongst common people and they felt at home with Him. He knew no distinctions of class or social standing; it was enough for Him that a man or a woman needed what He had to give. At one moment it might be a leading Pharisee, like Nicodemus, or the Ruler of a Synagogue like Jairus, or a rich young man loaded with many possessions; at another a Samaritan woman at the well-side, or a sinner taken in the act, or village mothers with their children. The outward circumstances of those who came to Him counted for nothing; the only thing that mattered was that they needed help and that He could help them. Never for a moment did He allow what He was to create barriers or separate Him from the humblest folk. That was one element in His humility.

And, again, conscious as He was of His powers, He

never dreamed that they were to be used for selfish ends. That battle was fought out once for all in the great forty days in the Wilderness. He was tempted then to use His powers to make life easy for Himself, to win Himself a name, to gain a speedy triumph. But He resolutely put the suggestion on one side. One is tempted to say that it was easy for Him to do so, for He never looked at life from that angle at all. Life for Him was just the chance of serving God and His fellow-men, and the powers He possessed were a trust to be used for God's glory and for the building of His Kingdom. He was to share all that He had freely and unreservedly with others, not that He might win their gratitude and gain the reward of popularity, but that by so doing He might most fully glorify God and help mankind.

That was the other main element in His humility. He was devoid of personal ambition, self-seeking was impossible for Him. He had one desire and one only, to give Himself and all that was in Him for others, without thought of His own loss or gain. His whole life was lived in the spirit of service, and yet there was never a trace of servility in His bearing. There was a natural dignity and self-confidence in Him which awed even His enemies. Even in the moment of His consummate act of humility and service, when He was hanging on the Cross, despised, rejected, deserted by His friends, the Roman soldier charged with His execution saw in His bearing something which marked Him as different from other men. In Christ we have the supreme example of power ennobled by humility and of a service which was kingly.

This is the spirit which He looks for in His followers. We are not to depreciate ourselves or wrap our talent in a napkin ; that is a false humility akin to laziness. We

ought to know what powers we possess, what is our special gift and capacity. But we must not regard our gifts as a possession to be used in our own interests, to carve out a career for ourselves and ensure success in life. These things may come our way, but they must never be our deliberate aim ; and if they come we must realise that they challenge us to fuller service. To whom much is given, of him shall be much required. We are to think of ourselves as stewards entrusted with certain gifts, for the possession of which we can claim no credit and for the use of which we shall one day have to render an account. Our duty is to employ them to increase the well-being of those about us, not to enrich ourselves. It matters little whether they bring us fame and popularity or whether our work is done in some obscure corner where no man sees us. All that the Christian should ask is that he may be useful and do something to make life better for those less fortunate than himself.

And since this is the Christian's ideal, he will refuse to keep himself aloof from his fellows. He has been born into a certain social class ; he has enjoyed, perhaps, a liberal education ; his natural gifts may have brought him to the front. He might allow these accidents, for such they are, to form a barrier between himself and others, but because he is a Christian he cannot do so. The very advantages which he enjoys are a perpetual challenge to him ; they cry aloud to be shared with others ; and in order that he may share them he must be one with his brethren, of whatever class, for he can only understand their needs by entering their lives. It is not through some paid agent, but with his own hands that his service must be rendered.

The man who sets these principles before him will find endless opportunities for service in the common

round of life. He will come to see his daily work from a different angle and learn to regard it chiefly as a means of rendering service to the community at large. He will find his chief happiness in devoting a part, perhaps the greatest part, of his leisure time to some form of social work ; it may be by serving on some public body or by running a boys' club or by organising games for children. There are a hundred forms of such Christian service calling for help to-day. And apart from such concrete activities as these, his eyes will be opened to a thousand little possibilities of service which most of us pass by unheeding. A kindly word, a helping hand, a cheery smile are small things in themselves, but many a man and woman has been saved by so small a thing as that. And only those who, for the sake of Christ, are seeking to serve their brethren are likely to see and seize such opportunities.

Let me close this chapter with some words of Henry Drummond : " To move among the people on the common street ; to meet them in the market place on equal terms ; to live among them not as saint or monk, but as brother-man with brother-man ; to bear the burdens of society and relieve its needs ; to carry on the multitudinous activities of the city—social, commercial, political, philanthropic—in Christ's spirit and for His ends ; this is the religion of the Son of Man.

CHAPTER VII

OUR DAILY WORK

THE earlier chapters of this book have been devoted to a rapid survey of the teaching of Jesus in quite general terms. They have attempted to sketch the background of the Christian life. We have seen that the first duty of the Christian is to love God in all the manifestations of His nature which He has granted to the world, and to express his love by helping to set up His Kingdom here on earth. And we have further seen that he must cultivate the simplicity of the childlike mind and make his chief ideal the service of his fellow-men. Now we go on to consider how these principles are to be applied to some of the common matters of daily life.

It has been pointed out already that one weakness of modern Christianity is its lack of distinctiveness. There is not much nowadays to differentiate a professing Christian from any decent member of society. His creed has, too often, little relation to his life ; his views and opinions are more likely to be formed by his environment or the traditions of his class than by the teaching of the Gospels. This is very far from what Jesus intended and from the practice of the early Church. To be a Christian in those days meant to be separate from the world ; *odium humani generis*, or, as we might translate it, other-worldliness, was the chief charge brought by their enemies against the first followers of Christ. The conversion

of the modern world to Christianity depends, more than anything else, upon the recapture of that distinctive spirit. So long as there is little difference between the point of view of Christians and of the world, it is unlikely that Christianity will make a very strong appeal. It is a platitude to say that men respond most readily when big things are asked of them ; the world will respond to the Christian challenge only when it is clear that to be a Christian means something big and difficult. A Christian ought to be known, then, not only by the fact that he goes to Church on Sunday, but by the fact that he is different from non-Christians in the week. He ought to be known in the first place by his attitude to what forms the chief part of most men's lives, their daily work. It is not unfair or untrue to say that the common view of work is that it is a disagreeable necessity. It is not only the whining schoolboy who creeps like a snail unwillingly to school. The average man frankly dislikes work and makes little effort to put his heart into what he has to do. It is necessary to work in order to earn a living, but work is regarded as an irksome thing, to be got through as rapidly as possible and to be put out of mind as soon as it is done. Pleasure and amusement are the chief end of life and they are counted happiest who can devote most time to them. It is not of any one class or section of society that this is true to-day ; dislike of work is typical right through the national life.

It is not altogether unnatural that it should be so. Work to-day is a very different thing from what it was a century ago. Life now is such a ceaseless rush that it is increasingly difficult to do anything well or to put one's mind into what one has to do. Everything must be carried out at top speed ; the slow worker, who is often the honest worker, is hopelessly outpaced and

quickly finds himself and his business on the scrap-heap. Moreover, the pace at which work must be done leads to frayed nerves and a general sense of the futility of the whole thing. It is a relief to get away from the pandemonium of the working day and possess one's soul in peace. And, further, work is for most of us a far less interesting thing than it was for our fathers. Mass production, standardisation, the over-specialisation of the processes of manufacture have robbed work of its individuality and therefore of its interest. More than ever before the worker, whether with hand or brain, feels himself to be but a tiny cog in a vast machine, an unit of infinitesimal importance in the general scheme of things.

All this is true, and yet the tendency to regard work as an evil must be resisted. If it is allowed to dominate men's minds it will lead to national disaster and decay. A recent essayist has told us that the collapse of the Roman Empire came about because "there was not enough good will, not enough honesty, not enough genuine interest in good work well done." History repeats itself and the causes which contributed to the decline and fall of Rome, will play the same part again. It is for those who are Christians to set an example to the rest ; they must cultivate in themselves a different attitude towards work in the hope that by degrees a higher conception of it may permeate the common life. In doing so they will deserve well of their country and help to save it from disaster. This is emphatically a Christian duty ; an unknown writer of the second century, describing the position of Christians in the world, sums up as follows : " In a word, what the soul is in the body, this the Christians are in the world. The soul is spread through all the members of the body, and Christians through the divers cities of the world. . . . The soul is

enclosed in the body and yet itself holdeth the body together ; so Christians are held in the world as in a prison house, and yet they themselves hold the world together." Or as another writer puts it in more modern language : " One Christian city, one city in any part of the earth, where religion had overflowed the Churches and passed into the streets, inundating every house and workshop, and permeating the whole social and commercial life, one such Christian city would seal the redemption of the world."

This is the highest form of patriotism and the Christian must always be a patriot in this sense. But it will not be the desire to save his country or even to save the world which will chiefly inspire his attitude towards work or any other of the problems of daily life. His chief motive must always be the plain desire to do God's will, to shape his life in accordance with the principles which Christ laid down.

How then ought a Christian to regard his work ? Surely as a debt which he owes, first to God, then to his fellow-men, and lastly to himself. It is a debt he owes to God. He has been made in the likeness of God and the chief object which he ought to set before himself is to keep that likeness clear and unspoiled. Be ye perfect, as your Father in heaven is perfect, was the challenge of Jesus. An impossible task, as all ideals are impossible of fulfilment, but it provides a standard by which to live. We owe it to God to mould our lives on what we know of Him, to grow upwards towards Him, not downwards and away. One certain fact we know of God to-day, that He is incessantly at work. The revelation of God as the eternal Worker has come to us through the discoveries of the scientists of sixty years ago. When theories of Evolution were first brought before the world,

they seemed to the Churchmen of that day to be sheer atheism. But reflection has shown us that, so far from driving God out of the Universe, they serve in fact to implant Him more firmly at the centre of its life. We see to-day more clearly than ever before that in Him all things live and move and have their being.

The traditional view of the creation of the world was consistent with the idea of a God Who, having finally completed His work, retired to an infinite distance from the world and there continued in perpetual rest and idleness, surrounded by adoring hosts of angels. We have only to glance over the most popular hymns of fifty years ago to realise how deeply that conception was rooted in the Christian mind. But Evolution has given us a new and far grander conception of the Deity. We think of God to-day as One Who is tirelessly at work, the Source of all the myriad life of the universe, the creative Mind Whose thoughts are ceaselessly issuing in new beginnings, the Architect Who never rests in the supervision of the works which He has planned. God is the eternal Worker, and we His sons and daughters, made in His image, owe it to our Maker not to be idle, but to make our work the chief interest of our lives.

And, in the second place, work is a debt which we owe to our fellow-men. There was a time in the history of the human race when man was self-sufficing or almost so. By his own exertions he was able to maintain himself and those for whom he was immediately responsible. He owed practically nothing to the labours of other men. But those days have long since passed away ; the history of civilisation, looked at from one angle, is the history of the growing interdependence of the human race. To-day we depend for the bare necessities of life upon a host of men and women in every corner of the world.

It is literally true that not a day passes upon which tens of thousands have not ministered to our needs. There are coolies in India, sheep-farmers in Australia, reapers in Canada, sailors and dock-labourers, transport workers and shopkeepers, and a thousand others upon whose work we depend for the maintenance of physical life. Another host of men and women is working to amuse or instruct our minds ; authors and playwrights, artists and musicians, printers and bookbinders, the name is legion of those upon whom we depend for mental stimulus. All these are continually doing us service in one form or another and we are continually enjoying the fruits of their labours.

The purely selfish man, into whose mind the idea of service has never penetrated, will no doubt be content to live on others and to make no return beyond the payment of sums of money in exchange for the goods which he receives. He will count himself fortunate to be able to secure the services of so great a multitude, while he contributes nothing to the common stock. But for a Christian that attitude is an impossibility, for it is in flat contradiction to the teaching of His Master. He that will be chief amongst you let him be the servant of all, was His injunction. And so the Christian will regard his work as his chief means of serving others. He will put his best into it not to win promotion or to increase his salary, but because he is determined that his contribution to the common good shall be the worthiest that he can make. Whatever his occupation may chance to be, however dull and monotonous, however seemingly unimportant, he will feel that in the performance of his daily work he is repaying a debt he owes, and helping to make life possible for other men.

And, finally, work is a debt which we owe to ourselves. We have not perhaps been used to think of self-respect

as a Christian virtue, but a moment's reflection will show us that it is so. One of the chief lessons which Jesus taught was the value of human personality, our own no less than that of other men. If we are worth so much to God that we may call ourselves His sons, if Christ Himself is not ashamed to call us brethren, it follows that we are in duty bound to respect ourselves and to make the best use of the lives which have been entrusted to us. To play with life, to let it rust in idleness is to be untrue to our best selves. The Christian's ideal must be creativeness, he must be ambitious to leave something behind which will make his life worth while, something attempted something done, to earn a night's repose. Not to feel such an ambition is to be lacking in self-respect, to be unconscious of what we owe to the personality which is in us.

As we look back over history we realise that those whom we most admire are the men of creative genius, great thinkers like Plato and Kant, great artists like Praxiteles and Michelangelo, great poets and musicians like Shakespeare and Beethoven, great lawgivers like Moses or Justinian, great statesmen like Pericles or Charlemagne. All these men in their different callings created in their life-time material or spiritual products which are the eternal possession of the world. They are the great outstanding men who have left a name behind them to declare their praises. But along with them there is a countless host of men and women which have no memorial, who are perished as though they had never been, but who none the less in their day and generation created things which have lasted centuries after their bodies have mouldered into dust. It is impossible for anyone who has a spark of imagination in his nature to visit one of our great Cathedrals without

giving a thought to the unknown men who built it, or to travel along such a highway as the Great North Road without being conscious of the Roman soldiers who first traced it out and of our rude forefathers, who, under their direction, made a safe way along which millions have gone about their business or their pleasure. One cannot even drive through some ancient hamlet without seeing in fancy the masons, and carpenters and thatchers who long years ago constructed the humble cottages in which generations of Englishmen have lived and died. We are surrounded everywhere by evidence of the productiveness of those who have gone before us, and we owe it to ourselves to leave something behind us when we go which shall be of value in the years to come. We have entered into the creative labours of other men and it is for us so to labour that others may enter into ours.

Our work then is a debt we owe to God, to other men, and to ourselves, and as Christians we shall be eager to discharge the debt. The pagan view of life, that it is a time to eat and drink for to-morrow we die, is all too prevalent to-day. Not the least service that Christians can render to their country and the world is to recover a healthier, worthier view and one that is more in accordance with what Jesus taught of God and man.

CHAPTER VIII

AMUSEMENTS

WE have considered what should be the attitude of the Christian towards his daily work. It is natural next to ask what is the place that amusements ought to take in his life. The subject is one of especial importance to-day. For the majority of people the working hours have been greatly shortened during the last fifty years. It may be true that we work much harder than our fathers, but it is equally true that the amount of time which is given to work has been greatly reduced. Nearly all of us have far more leisure than the men and women of the last generation enjoyed, and it is clearly our duty, if we are taking life seriously, to adopt some principles to guide us in the use of our leisure. It has been wisely said that one of the chief tasks to be undertaken in the present age is that of teaching men how to employ the hours in which they are their own masters.

It need hardly be said that, for the Christian, amusement can never be regarded as the end of life. It has already been pointed out that a man's work, his contribution to the sum total of the world's production, ought to be his chief interest and the main object of his existence. That is implicit in the whole Christian scheme of things. Some may be engaged in producing material objects for the use of their fellow-men, others may have devoted their lives to producing things of spiritual value ; but

that we should be producing something is our bounden duty and the chief means by which we are to fulfil our calling to be the sons of God, Who is the eternal Worker and Producer. This sounds a truism, which it is waste of time to emphasise, and yet it is ignored by very many in these days. There is a large number of people in every station of life who obviously take far greater interest in their amusements than in their work, and not a few whose whole life is devoted to pleasure of one kind and another. The author of a recent volume of Memoirs takes a gloomy view of the situation. "Pleasure," she says, "used to be regarded as a side-show. It is so regarded no longer. Pleasure is everything, not a side-show, but the glittering drama of life. It is the reason for being alive." Allowing for the exaggeration of a *laudator temporis acti*, it cannot be denied that there is a good deal in what the writer says. One has only to study the pages of our daily papers to realise the place which games and amusements hold in the minds of intelligent people nowadays. One has only to talk to the young to learn what pleasure means to them. One has only to mark the ubiquity of places of amusement in every town to estimate its importance in the lives of the majority of men.

It will not, I hope, be taken as a sign of the dull spirit of middle age to say that there is something a little contemptible in the mental outlook of the man whose chief interest in life is the propelling of a little ball into a distant hole or the driving of rather larger balls to boundaries or into goal-nets. Such diversions form a pleasant interlude in the more serious business of life, but to make them, as thousands do, the main interest is to argue a certain lack of proportion, if nothing worse. They may be innocent and harmless ways of spending

time, but Christianity asks of us something more than innocence and harmlessness.

What, then, is the true function of amusement? We have to answer that question before we can say what ought to be the attitude of the Christian towards that side of life. It can perhaps be best defined by saying that amusement and recreation should be regarded as synonymous. Our amusements are meant to recreate us. At the end of the working day, and still more at the end of the working year, our minds and bodies are tired and worn out. If they are not so, it is probably a proof of the fact that we have not been putting our best selves into our work. We cannot put out either physical or mental powers at high pressure without feeling that the virtue has gone out of us. It is said to-day that this is true even of inanimate objects; there is, we are told, such a thing as the fatigue of metals; machinery must be allowed periods of rest and recuperation. Such a condition is far more likely to be true of the delicately balanced human machine. After a spell of work, muscles are tired, nerves are frayed, our power of output is diminished. Under such conditions we need to recreate our bodily and mental powers in order that we may continue to do good work. If we fail to do so, the quality of our work will be impaired and we shall be less useful members of society, less able to play our part in the common life.

The means of recreation will differ with different people. For some complete rest is the most complete refreshment; all they ask at the end of the day's work is to be allowed to sit before the fire, to read a book, to play a game of Patience; and for their annual holiday they choose a spot as far from the world as possible, where there is nothing to be done and they can regain their

vigour by being frankly idle. But there are others whose temperament demands something more stimulating. They will best rebuild their bodily strength not by idleness, but by taking active exercise of a kind different from that demanded by their daily work. They will most refresh their minds not by letting them lie fallow but by the introduction of new ideas which have no place in the common round of life. And so they seek, and rightly seek, amusements, as a means of re-creating their powers of mind and body.

It will be seen from what has been said that amusements cannot be regarded as a side-issue, unrelated to the main stream of life. They have a quite definite part to play in the living of a complete and useful life, and this being so the Christian will be as anxious to regulate them on fixed principles as he is to harmonise every other part of his life with the rules of the Kingdom as laid down by Christ. If we have not been accustomed to think of our amusements as having anything to do with our religion, it is only another instance of the harm that is done by dividing life into water-tight compartments.

It has been suggested that the true function of amusements is the recreation and refreshment of mind and body. We must be careful therefore that those we take part in really fulfil this function, for there is only too much amusement to-day which is definitely harmful and destructive. It has always been so, and for this reason at various periods there have arisen movements in the Church which have endeavoured to establish the principle that all so-called worldly amusements should be avoided by Christian people. Those who have adopted that view have taken their stand upon the injunction of St. Paul that we should avoid every appearance of evil. They have found evil in many of the pleasures of the world

and have therefore thought it right to turn their back upon them altogether. Conspicuous amongst such movements were that of the Montanists under the leadership of Tertullian in the third century and, more familiar to most of us, that of the Puritans and of their lineal descendants, the Evangelicals, in times quite near our own. As is well known, the latter put a ban upon theatre-going, card-playing, dancing and even, in extreme cases, upon such an innocent recreation as attendance at a concert.

No thoughtful man can do otherwise than admire the austerity of the Puritan position. Their attitude was a not unneeded protest against much that was plainly evil and degrading, and we owe them a debt of gratitude for the stand they took. But it is possible to admire them and yet to feel that they were wrong. Their attitude was closely allied to asceticism, and asceticism, as distinct from temperance and self-control, has never been a Christian virtue. It is based upon the belief that the world is fundamentally evil and that the only right relation with the world, is to escape from it. The principle, if it is a right one, would carry us much further than the amusements of the world. Politics, commerce, art are none of them free from much that is evil, and the ascetic, if he is consistent, will cut himself off from these and indeed from most other worldly occupations as well, and not from its amusements only. This is what Bunyan makes his pilgrims do when they come to Vanity Fair ; they refuse to have part or lot with anything that goes on there, and from the strictly Puritan point of view they are quite logical in their behaviour.

But Christ never taught that asceticism was a rule of the Christian life, nor did He practice it Himself. Unlike the Baptist He mixed freely with the world and

by so doing earned for Himself the name of a man gluttonous and a wine-bibber. The Gospels devote little space to recording what we may call the lighter side of the Master's life, but they tell us enough to assure us that He never held aloof from the pleasures and amusements of those amongst whom He lived. Of one thing, however, we may be certain, that He never shared in any pleasure which could do harm to those who took part in it, and His followers, while they are not called to forswear amusements, are in duty bound to observe that rule themselves.

Keeping our definition of the function of amusement in mind, it is not hard to draw the line. Some plays are a refreshment and a stimulus to jaded minds, others pander to all that is worst in human nature ; some novels suggest new and stimulating ideas, others fill the mind with fatuity and filth ; to some people dancing is in the truest sense a recreation, but there are modern dances which derive their origin from the more debased races of the world ; to many men a game of cards is a real refreshment at the end of the day's work, but where the gambling element enters all that is good in card-playing is in danger of being lost.

Gambling deserves a paragraph to itself. It is one of the most successful kill-joys of the world. It would be an easy task to prove that every game or sport into which the gambling spirit has penetrated has been degraded and demoralised by its entrance. There are many arguments which can be brought against gambling in every form, from speculation on the Stock Exchange to raffles at a Church bazaar, but there is one with which we are especially concerned in this chapter. It has been argued that the chief end of our amusement is to refresh and recreate us ; this gambling can never do. Apart from

the harm it does in other directions, it introduces into our amusements the desire for gain ; we play our games not for their own sake, but partly at least for the money we hope to make out of them. And thus our minds, so far from finding refreshment in the game, are all the time upon the *qui vive* ; the fear of losing and the desire to win undo the good which we ought to be getting from the game. It would be surprising to learn that, psychologically, gambling was good for anyone.

The conclusion of the whole matter is that Christians ought to discriminate between what is good and bad in the matter of amusements more carefully than they have sometimes done in the past. It is difficult to escape the impression that the attitude of some Churchmen towards the whole subject is dictated by reaction from the extreme views of those who hold the Puritan position. To the pure all things are pure may be a true statement, but for most of us it tends to be a dangerous one. It is true that St. Paul claimed liberty for the Christian conscience in the matter of eating meat offered to idols and such-like things, but he also reminded his readers that there were things lawful indeed, but not expedient. We must all of us decide these matters for ourselves ; no universal law about amusements has ever been laid down by the Christian Church. But in deciding upon our amusements let us be sure that we are acting upon fixed principles, and not being led by our individual preference.

This chapter has been devoted to one such principle. There are others which ought to be equally binding on our consciences, but which can only be briefly mentioned here. We should endeavour, for example, to discover the effect which our amusements have upon our spiritual life. That is almost too obvious to need more than a passing word. How do they affect our sense of God's

presence, how do they influence our prayers, what part do they play in our relationship with Christ? We purchase our pleasures very dearly if they make God less real, if they hinder our power to pray, if they come between us and Jesus Christ.

And again, we must remember, in this and other matters, that we do not live for ourselves alone. Happy is the man who condemneth not himself in that which he alloweth, but happier still is he whose friends have no occasion to condemn him. It may well be that some form of amusement which is, shall we say, upon the border line, does a man no harm and yet does grievous harm to the weaker brother who follows his example. It is a big thing to ask that a man should give up something which he enjoys without hurt to himself, because another may be injured by taking part in it. But Christianity does ask us to do big things, and self-denial is one of its fundamental principles. Few of us would hesitate to risk our lives to save a man from drowning. Is it too much to ask that we should risk the loss of some form of pleasure if by so doing we can lend a helping hand to some one weaker than ourselves? Lead us not into temptation is our daily prayer. Let us be certain that in our amusements we are not leading others there.

CHAPTER IX

MONEY

THE Christian is one whose whole life is governed by his loyalty to the teaching of Jesus Christ. He does not confine his religion to any one department but sincerely tries to make it permeate all his activities. And, since this is his ideal, he will certainly regard his use of money as coming within the sphere of his allegiance. There is hardly anything which is so self-revealing as our attitude towards money. The value we attach to it, the means by which we acquire it, and the way in which we spend it show more than anything else the principles by which our lives are ruled. It is not only the miser and the spendthrift who advertise their respective characters to the world. We can none of us avoid showing what manner of men we are by our use of money.

It is impossible to read the Gospels without realising the importance which Christ attached to money, not, of course, for its own sake, but for the effect that it had upon human character. He knew how closely it was connected with spiritual conditions and how large a part it plays in making or marring men. It is not untrue to say that, while He never condemned the rich as such, He did condemn riches because they constitute a real danger to spiritual life. And it is to be remembered that in His time riches were measured by a very different standard

from that which obtains to-day ; what was great wealth in Palestine would seem a very moderate income now.

Jesus condemned wealth for two reasons. In the first place it tends to give its possessor a material outlook upon life and makes him attach too great importance to bodily comforts. It is hard for those who are rich to avoid regarding money and what money brings as the standard by which they measure all things. Comfort and ease and luxury are at the command of those whose purses are well lined. Such things come to be taken for granted and end by becoming indispensable and assuming a far greater importance than they ought. The rich man is in danger of getting his values wrong. And, in the second place, paradoxical as it may seem, wealth tends to make men selfish. Generally speaking it is those who have most money who care most about it and find it most difficult to share what they have with others. The possession of money creates needs which demand to be satisfied and the satisfaction of which leaves, comparatively speaking, only the crumbs to be thrown to the beggar at the gate. There are, of course, noteworthy exceptions to this rule. The generosity of some rich men is princely, but for the most part it is true that greater unselfishness is to be found amongst the poor than amongst those who have great possessions.

And so Jesus warned His followers to be on their guard against the peculiar dangers and temptations of which money is the source. The deceitfulness of riches has made shipwreck of many a Christian life and it is still true that it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter into the Kingdom of God. How many take His words to heart, and regard their use of money as an integral part of their religious life ? Is it not true of most of us that Chris-

tianity only touches our pockets in connection with what we give to religious or charitable objects? A certain part of our income, so we say, belongs to God; the rest is our own and we do not regard the way in which we get or spend it as matters with which religion has any particular concern. But those who are pledged to regard the whole of life as subject to Christ's laws, cannot exclude so essential and fundamental part of it from His dominion. They will be as anxious to establish Christian principles in the sphere of money as in any other, and to guard themselves against the dangers inherent in its use.

It is important first to recognise that we must be as scrupulous in the getting of our money as in the spending of it. The sources of our income matter even more, perhaps, than its disposal, and the Christian ought to aim at a higher standard than the world's. It is not unfair to say that the world's standard with regard to the making of money is that, short of dishonesty, it is legitimate to acquire it by any means which we are clever enough to devise. The standard of commercial honesty is higher than is sometimes supposed by superficial critics. That there are rogues in business, as in every other walk of life, goes without saying, but the majority of business men are scrupulously honest. This does not mean, however, that business is run as a philanthropic concern; the business man would be the first to confess that active love of his neighbour is not the first principle upon which he acts. And, in so far as this is true, business is not a Christian enterprise, for the Christian law is the law of service and teaches that we should love our neighbour as ourselves. This is not the occasion, nor is the present writer the person, to embark upon a consideration of Christian economics. That has been done by far abler pens. But there are two main principles involved in the

source from which our money comes which seem to spring naturally from the law of Christ.

The first is that, so far as is possible for us, we should never be willing to receive money for which some adequate return has not been made. Money, after all, first came into use because it formed a convenient means of exchange when the bartering of goods could no longer be carried on as society became more complex. And this must be regarded as its only legitimate use on Christian principles. Money should be regarded as the return which we receive for the services which we, or those who are responsible for supplying our needs, have rendered to the community. Any money which is not the equivalent of some service is in its nature tainted. To receive wages or salary which we have not truly earned by the best output of our work is false to the Christian principle. To make money by speculation, whereby the cost of necessities may be artificially increased, is to offend against the law of Christ. To buy shares to-day in the hope that to-morrow they may rise to the advantage of our pockets, or to get money by betting, is to receive that for which we have made no return in service and is unchristian. These are only a few instances of wrong ways of making money against which every Christian should be on his guard. It has been suggested by extremists that to live upon money we have saved, or which we have inherited from those who saved it for us, is wrong. But there is nothing in such a practice of which a Christian need be ashamed, provided only that the money thus obtained was in the first instance acquired in return for service. That is the first main principle which is at stake.

The second is not unlike it. We must see to it that, so far as in us lies, we never receive money at the cost of injustice to others. We must be scrupulously careful

about our investments and in the matter of the dividends which they earn. In the complicated financial arrangements of the modern world this is a really difficult problem for very many, and yet one cannot but feel that shareholders might quite easily take more interest than they do in the conditions under which their dividends are earned. It would perhaps create a sensation if at the annual meeting of some Company a group of shareholders demanded to be told whether the employees of the Company were being adequately provided for, and moved a reduction in the rate of interest if the reply was an unsatisfactory one. Such a procedure would, no doubt, create a sensation in the city, but it might do a deal of good. Owners of house property have an especial responsibility in this connection. There are still too many Churchmen whose incomes are derived from slums at which they would be the first to be horrified if they would visit them. The Christian has no right to appoint an agent to manage such matters for him, with the result that in some cases at least he is living upon the degradation of human life.

That is one side of the picture ; the other represents the way in which we spend our money, and here there are three things to be said. In the first place the Christian ought to be conspicuously more charitable than other men. He ought deliberately to live below his income, not only or chiefly that he may save for his old age, but that he may have the more to give away. If Christian homes were noticeably more simple in their way of life than the homes of other men, if real self-denial were a more common Christian virtue, there would be less talk of the inconsistency of Christians. For men will always judge religion by its fruits, and the first fruit of Christian service is to love others as we love ourselves. There is

an old saying which many Christians might well take to heart :

Pray till the tears come,
Work till the sweat comes,
Give till it hurts.

How many of us can claim that we have given at the cost of real self-sacrifice ?

And in the second place the Christian must be far more conscientious in his purchasing than others. The terrible conditions of sweated labour which existed in the past were almost entirely due to the demand of the consumer for cheapness at any price. In our desire to make our money go as far as possible and to get the best value for it, we have unconsciously and ignorantly, no doubt, condemned our fellows to what were often no better than starvation wages. Have we not often asked the shopkeeper if he has not the same article at a rather cheaper price ? We did not stop to think that the pence or shillings saved to our pockets was wrung out of the ill-paid toil of those who were ministering to our needs. Conditions are better now ; in most trades rates of wages are regulated and controlled. But there are many loop-holes and the Christian man will see to it that in his shopping he pays a fair price for what he buys.

And finally we must apply our Christian principles to money spent on public services. Rates are prosaic and disagreeable things and at municipal elections there is no more popular appeal than the promise to keep them down. High rates are not synonymous with Christianity, and are in some cases clearly unjustified, but the attempt by every means to keep them low may be and often is in direct opposition to Christ's teaching. The complexity of modern life, the unnatural separation of the

classes from one another, the widespread ignorance of the conditions under which others are forced to live, combine between them to make it increasingly difficult for most men to fulfil the Christian law of helping those in need. The difficulty may to a large extent be overcome by the aid of the innumerable societies and institutions which exist to help the poor. But it is doubtful, when all is said and done, whether that is the best and wisest way. It is at least arguable that such work is better done by the community as a whole than by private enterprise. This is a controversial matter and cannot, therefore, be thrashed out in such a book as this. But it may at least be pointed out that a reduction of the rates very often results in the starvation of services which are essential to the well-being of the poorer members of the community. Housing and public health and education are amongst the objects for which rates are levied, and it ill becomes followers of Him Whose whole life was given to the help of the weak and heavy laden to lend their support to efforts to reduce the amount from which the wants of the weaker members of society are supplied. It is within the knowledge of most of us that in some areas at least the vital matter of the housing of the poor is hindered and thwarted at every turn by those who are averse from adding a quite inconsiderable sum to the demands of the rate-collector. The maxim that the Lord loveth a cheerful giver should be applied not only to private and voluntary charity, but to the sums which we contribute as citizens to meet the needs of the community at large.

This chapter has dealt in a cursory and superficial way with a big and important subject. Let it close with the reminder that money is sacramental through and through. Our attitude towards it, the way in which we use it, may

reveal the mean and sordid spirit which we would fain hide even from ourselves. But on the other hand it may be a true sacrament of Christian love, an outward and visible sign of our allegiance to Jesus Christ and to the law of service which He taught. Our possessions, be they small or great, may be a weight which drags us down to death, or form a golden staircase up which we climb to God.

CHAPTER X

CITIZENSHIP

OUR allegiance to Jesus Christ ought to make us more strenuous in our work, more disciplined in our amusements, and more careful about the getting and spending of our money ; but above all it ought to make us better citizens. The follower of Christ must be in the van of those who are fighting against the forces of cruelty and selfishness which cramp men's lives and degrade their manhood. He must be foremost in every effort to create cleaner and healthier surroundings for men to live in and to transform the grim environment in which so many lives are spent. He must be the declared and fearless enemy of injustice and oppression wherever he may meet them. He must in a word apply the teaching of His Master to the whole round of the common life. That teaching must be his law, first on the personal and individual side of life, but not less in his relationships with the community at large.

All this is something like a truism of to-day, but it was not always so. The outstanding failure of English Christianity in the nineteenth century, and especially in its earlier years, was the failure of the Church to recognise these facts. The religious forces of those days were so preoccupied, first with the revival of personal religion and then with the strengthening of the Church itself, that they were blind to the necessity for determined

action against the patent social evils of the day. Meanwhile the Industrial Revolution was taking place and modern England was evolved with small regard to Christian principles.

Things are vastly better now, but it is perhaps worth while to remind ourselves of the fallacy which underlay much of the indifference of Christians in that period to the social and economic conditions which weighed so heavily upon their fellow-countrymen. Their fundamental mistake was the unreal distinction which they made between the spiritual and material sides of life. The two spheres were regarded as entirely separate, almost indeed as mutually exclusive. The spiritual, it was held, could not invade the material sphere without serious, perhaps fatal, loss. The parson who was interested in drains or housing was dubbed "unspiritual" by his brethren. These were secular affairs, the province of politicians and vestrymen; the Christian, as such, was concerned with the soul, and with the life of the world to come. Let him confine himself and his religion to its proper sphere and leave the affairs of the material world to others.

To-day we think differently; we have come to see that the spiritual and material sides of life, so far from being independent of one another, act and react upon each other at every turn. We can hardly disentangle spiritual conditions from their material causes, for there is no material problem which has not its spiritual effects. The housing problem is on the surface a question of bricks and mortar, of labourers' wages and economic rents; but fundamentally it is a problem of human lives, of the conditions amidst which God's children are to grow up, a conflict between the sordid surroundings of the slums and an environment into which some gleams

of what is beautiful, some intimations of the divine are allowed to enter. And so with problems of wages and unemployment. In a sense they are material problems, but in a deeper sense they are spiritual, for where there is the crushing burden of financial anxiety, such as thousands know, there is small hope of the growth of spiritual life.

It is, then, no longer possible to separate the material from the spiritual, and to hold that the Kingdom of God is concerned only with the souls of men. It is strange that Christians were ever able to persuade themselves to do so, for the whole teaching and example of Jesus Christ is plain upon the point. He taught us to ask God to supply all our material needs, for the petition "Give us this day our daily bread" plainly refers to everything that is necessary for our bodily life. He showed by every miracle that He cared greatly for man's physical conditions and not only for His spiritual welfare. His parables of the Good Samaritan and of the Sheep and Goats are a proof of what He expected of His followers. It is only by ignoring a great part of His teaching that it is possible to maintain the principle that Christianity is unconcerned with the material conditions of men's lives.

In theory this principle is very generally accepted to-day. It is only when we come to apply it in actual practice that difficulties arise. We can, it is true, do something as individuals to fulfil the role of Christian citizen. There are many openings for personal service of one kind and another, wherever we may live, and as Christians we shall take advantage of them. There are evils and abuses to be found not far from the doors of all of us ; the road from Jerusalem to Jericho may be found in most English towns and Good Samaritans need seldom

be out of work. Our daily intercourse with others, in shops, in trams and buses, and in the street, furnish endless opportunities for the display of good citizenship.

But when we have embraced them all, we have only touched the fringe of a vast and complicated subject. There is a great mass of human suffering caused by bad conditions, with which we never come in touch and of the very existence of which we are hardly aware. What does the average well-to-do Englishman know of the life which is lived in the slums of our great cities, of the tragedy of long continued unemployment, of the effects of gambling and intemperance? The classes are segregated from one another; we know next to nothing of each others' lives; in every town Belgravia and Bethnal Green are in different worlds. And yet a Christian cannot escape responsibility on the score of ignorance, cannot evade his duty as a citizen because he lives in a different quarter of the city. The comfort of his own life, the amenities with which he is surrounded, make him more than ever his brother's keeper. He has no right to quiet his conscience by subscribing to this or that Society which exists to deal with the results of what is a deep-rooted disease. It is his bounden duty to get down below the surface and attack the disease itself.

But here he is faced by a further difficulty. To attack the causes of our social evils demands an expert knowledge which the average man does not possess. The remedies for bad housing or unemployment can only be found after long and patient study, for which he has neither the time nor the ability. The individual, be he ever so eager to do his duty as a citizen, is helpless in the face of the complexity of modern life. It is likely that he will do more harm than good by endeavouring to deal with problems which can only be wisely treated on the largest

scale and by men of expert knowledge. It would be easy enough to give instances of bad made worse by the best intentioned bungling with such subjects. Once in a generation a Shaftesbury may arise, who almost single-handed tackles some great evil, but such men are rare and, as social conditions become more complicated, it grows less likely that any one man will be big enough to cope with them. There is almost nothing which individuals can achieve in face of the immensity of our social and industrial problems. But there is one way in which the Christian can bring his influence to bear and that is the corporate way. It is only by political action that he can hope to discharge what he knows to be his duty as a follower of Christ. We have allowed politics to earn an ugly name and there are many who maintain that religion must keep clear of all entanglement in political activities. But there must surely be something strangely out of gear, if Christian principles have no place in the political field. For politics is the science of the well-being of the polis and of all who dwell within its boundaries, and there can be no sphere in which we can more fully apply the command to love our neighbour as ourself.

The very purpose for which we elect men to represent us in Parliament or on the local Council is that they should devote themselves to the unravelling of those problems for which we have neither time nor capacity. The first duty of a member of any public body is to think and act for the common good and not in the interests of a class or party. It is for men who will do so, disinterested men—of whom, thank God, there is a far greater number in public life to-day than at any previous period of our history—that we should vote when the chance is given us. Our vote is a religious duty, not to be given blindly

for the candidate of some particular colour, but for the man whom we conscientiously believe will best advance the interests of the community as a whole, and especially of those members of it least able to help themselves. It may well be that at the time of an election Christian opinion will be divided between the candidates ; it may be that to some one policy, to some another, will seem most consistent with the law of Christ. Such differences are bound to be, but they matter very little so long as the main principle is kept in view by all. It may even be an advantage that Christians should support different policies and vote in different ways. No one who is not a blind partisan believes that any one party or group of men has a monopoly of wisdom or of truth. It is, perhaps, crying for the moon to look for the day when party leaders will frame their policies after free and open consultation with each other, and when proposals for reform will never be rejected merely because they have been first suggested by the other side. But Christians can at least move in that direction by resolutely setting themselves to see the common problems from the point of view of others, by refusing to impute evil motives and by giving credit to their political opponents for a sincere desire to further the common good.

It is impossible to leave the subject without touching, however briefly, upon a controversial topic, the part which the Church as a corporate body should play in political affairs. It is very widely held that they are outside her sphere and that she has no right to interfere in politics at all. Such a book as this is not the place for a full discussion of the subject, but it cannot be entirely omitted. No thoughtful Churchman can desire to see an alliance between the Church and any party in the State. Even if such an alliance were possible, which it

clearly is not, it would be disastrous to the Church. But those who resent her interference in any shape or form must remember that politics are not a thing apart from the ordinary life of the world. It was never more true than it is to-day that what takes place in Parliament touches the lives of all of us at every turn and makes itself felt in the moral and spiritual sphere no less than in the economic and industrial. And since this is so, the Church would surely be betraying one of her prime duties if she exerted no influence in matters so far reaching. Christians are pledged to uphold standards of justice and of freedom. Is it right that they should do so as individuals, but wrong to exert a corporate influence? When Wilberforce was fighting in Parliament for the freedom of the slaves, or Shaftesbury was engaged in his long campaign for just conditions for the workers in mines and factories at home, was it the duty of the Church in her corporate capacity to keep silence? Ought she not rather to have thrown all her forces into the struggle? We have been lately told by a leading politician that there are certain moral problems with which the Church may rightly deal in the political area, and he instanced the Temperance question as a leading example of what he meant. Is drunkenness then a greater moral evil than bad housing? Is not the slum landlord a chief cause of excessive drinking? Is it, in other words, possible to segregate one social evil and assign that to the Churches as their proper sphere? Are not our social problems inextricably intertwined and must not the followers of Jesus Christ touch all or none?

These are large questions and they can only be lightly touched on. Let this chapter end, as it began, by insistence upon the fact that Christianity implies good citizenship, and that the law of Christ must be applied

to every side of life. In modern days the individual is compelled to delegate to representatives duties which he is not competent to fulfil himself. The Christian man will look upon his vote as an integral part of his religion and use his political influence in the cause of Christ.

CHAPTER XI

THE ENABLING SPIRIT

IT is, for the most part, comparatively easy to perceive and know what things we ought to do. There are, it may be, occasions when we are in genuine perplexity and cannot see clearly what is the right course of action under all the circumstances. It is then that the wise man will seek the help of a friend of greater experience than his own. But normally the path of Christian duty is reasonably clear. The difficulty lies in following it, in doing what conscience and the study of Christ's teaching show us to be right. For, explain it as we will, it is nearly always easier to do the wrong thing than the right. Nor is it only Christians who have felt this difficulty. Ovid, the pagan poet, realised it as clearly as Paul, the Christian teacher. *Video meliora proboque, deteriora sequor*, said the former; I see and approve what is good, but I pursue the lower course. The latter uses almost similar language; the good that I would do I do not; the evil that I would not that I do.

We are made, it is true, in the likeness of God; made, that is to say, with the capacity to rise to the heights of unselfishness and service. But the insistent demands of our lower nature are too strong for our better selves. The inexorable law of gravitation is as active in the spiritual as in the physical world, and draws us ever downwards. We may be possessed of sufficient spiritual

force to enable us to overcome the big temptations and avoid the grosser sins, but to live consistently, and especially in little things, on the Christian level is beyond our power. Like the rich young man we cannot rise to the demands which wholehearted allegiance to Jesus Christ makes upon us. Our love of ease and comfort, the claims of self, the desire for worldly success are stronger forces in our lives than our ambition to follow in His footsteps, and so we make the great refusal. We hear the call to service, but we pursue a lower course.

Must we admit, then, that Christ demanded of His followers more than human nature can attain to? Is it impossible to be a Christian? Are they right who say that the precepts of the Sermon on the Mount represent an unpractical ideal, beautiful indeed, but hopelessly beyond our reach, an Utopian dream, but one which could only be realised if we ourselves, and the world we live in, and the surroundings of our lives were other than they are? Is Christianity an impossible attempt to establish upon earth the conditions which can only obtain in Heaven? These are the contentions of hard-headed, practical men, who pride themselves upon the fact that they are realists, seeing things as they are and not allowing themselves to be misled by idle fancies. They would be horrified if they were told that they were atheists; but that in effect they are, for in their hearts they say, There is no God.

Left to ourselves, we know too well, we have no power to help ourselves. While we recognise the beauty of Christian standards and admire the Christian character when we meet it in our friends, yet for ourselves we feel that it is far beyond our reach. But there is a Power without us which makes for righteousness and which, entering in, can strengthen and enable us. By reason of

the frailty of our nature we cannot always, cannot often we might more truly say, stand upright. But there is One Who can supply such strength and protection as may support us in all dangers and carry us through all temptations. Among the chief lessons which the Christian has to learn is how to avail himself of this external help.

The truth about human nature seems to be that it stands somewhere between earth and heaven. It contains elements which are akin to the divine, and others which drag us down to the level of the beasts. These two sides of our nature are ceaselessly at war, but in most of us the latter are the stronger and have control. Our better self can only feebly struggle against its master and gain from time to time a hard-won victory. The flesh lusteth against the spirit and the spirit against the flesh, for these are contrary the one to the other ; so that we cannot do the things that we would. In some men it would appear that the divine element is stronger than in others ; they have a larger store of spiritual force than most of us possess ; they can more readily keep their lower impulses in check ; they find it comparatively easy to be good. But of most of us it is sadly true that the animal is stronger than the spirit. And yet, in spite of everything, we do not quite give in.

Our soul, in its rose mesh,
Pulled ever to the earth, still yearns for rest.

And the reason is that the divine element is always at work within us ; we have all some little store of spiritual force which will not allow us to give up the struggle. Our problem is how to increase and develop this force until it can fight the enemy on more equal terms and in the end secure the victory.

This is where God comes in. He is the source of all

spiritual life and force. There is within His Being a never-failing supply of power, sufficient for the needs of all His children. Two illustrations may help to drive the truth home to our minds. Away in the mountains of North Wales there was a little valley, watered by a tiny river, which was fed in turn by brooks and streamlets running down the hill-sides. Years ago there came to that valley engineers, who built an enormous dam across its mouth, so that no water could escape. The months went on and by degrees the valley floor was flooded; the water rose, submerging the few scattered dwellings which stood there, until in course of time a great lake, fed by summer rains and winter snows, was formed. Meanwhile, some fifty miles of pipes had been laid across the country, to connect the lake with the distant city of Liverpool, with the result that to-day every drop of water drawn to supply the needs of those who live there comes from the inexhaustible source far away in the Welsh mountains. In the driest summer, when the need is greatest, the reservoir has never failed. Or, again, the traveller from Waterloo, as his train leaves the station, can see across the river four great factory chimneys. They mark the site of an electric power station. Night and day, year in and year out, vast dynamos are ceaselessly at work creating electric force, which is stored in great accumulators and thence runs out along wires and rails, to light the houses, run the trams and trains, and work the machinery of all that neighbourhood. There is in the power station a never-failing supply of electric force, which is at the disposal of anyone who works a lever or presses down a switch. The housewife in Liverpool who needs a pail of water, the parlour maid in Chelsea who wants to light a room can draw upon supplies which are practically inexhaustible.

These illustrations give us some faint idea of the unfailing supplies of spiritual force which are in God and which are available for all His children. We, with our little spiritual force, so patently inadequate in face of the difficulties and temptations of our lives, can draw upon inexhaustible supplies which, entering into us, increase and reinforce what we ourselves possess. For it is to be noted that the spiritual force we have is in its essence akin to that which is in God ; there is some spark of the divine in each of us. It follows that, when we pray for help, we are not asking Him to supply us with some alien force, something utterly foreign to our own nature, so that our personality is put out of action and a mysterious gift from Him supplants it. We are rather asking Him to pour into our souls the reinforcements which they need, so that our little power may be strengthened and the victory be won.

To some this will seem fanciful and hard to understand. But is it any harder to believe than something with which we are familiar every day ? We are all aware of the power of human influence. We have most of us experienced the impact of a stronger personality upon our own, and we can many of us thank God for what we owe to it. We have a friend of outstanding strength of character, and his very friendship deeply affects our lives. It is not what he says to us, though that may help ; it is not that we consciously try to imitate him, though we shall be wise to do so ; it is just that something seems to pass from him to us, which makes us better, stronger men. We call it influence, and by the very name betray our ignorance of its nature, for influence only means something which flows in. There flows into our personality from his some spiritual force, some part of himself, and to a greater or a less degree it affects our

character. If that is true in human relationships, if one personality can act upon another in such a way, is it not far more likely to be true of the supreme Personality which is God. Is it too difficult to believe that He can influence and affect the characters of men, as men can do with one another? It is the same process which, in another aspect, we speak of as inspiration. The Spirit of God breathes into the mind of man to quicken his perceptions and enlighten his understanding, so that he may see and reveal to his fellows the hidden things of God Himself.

Every time that we repeat the Creed and profess our faith in God the Holy Ghost, we are expressing our belief in the fact that God is active in the lives of men to-day. He did not place man upon the earth and leave him unaided to work out his destiny. He is not far from every one of us and His Spirit is ever at hand to reinforce our weakness. That is what Jesus meant when He promised that the Comforter should come to His disciples. They were faced with a task immeasurably too hard for their little strength and courage. Their spiritual force was bound to fail when the days of difficulty and danger came. And so He promised that they should not be left comfortless; ye shall receive power, He said, when the Holy Ghost is come upon you. It is unfortunate that we have lost the original sense of the word Comforter. In modern English it suggests someone who consoles and soothes us when we are in trouble. But that is not the first meaning of the word, nor is it what Christ meant when He made the promise. To comfort is to make strong, a comforter is one who strengthens and that is one of the chief functions of the Holy Spirit. The original language of the Fourth Gospel emphasises the point even more clearly. It speaks of the Holy Spirit

in this place as the Paraclete, a name derived from two Greek words which mean the person I call to my side when I am in difficulties. It was the common title of an advocate in the law courts. The defendant has not the skill or knowledge to meet successfully the accusation brought against him. So he calls to his side an expert to help him win his case. We are familiar with the Latin name for the expert in the law courts, for to this day we speak of him as an Advocate. His Greek name of Paraclete is less familiar, but its meaning is precisely the same, and that is the name which Jesus gave to the Divine Spirit, when He told His disciples that He would come to reinforce and strengthen them.

We have been touching on theology, but it is a theological truth of enormous practical importance with which we have been dealing. It is hardly an exaggeration to say that the very possibility of a successful Christian life depends upon our grasp and understanding of it. The demands which Christ makes upon us are difficult to meet, but they are not impossible, for along with the demands goes the promise that spiritual force, sufficient for our needs, will be supplied. We shall still have to fight, for God helps only those who help themselves, but we shall not fight single-handed. Behind us is the unfailing power of God ; within us, if we seek them, are spiritual reinforcements which will turn the scale, for

Every virtue we possess
And every victory won,
And every thought of holiness
Are His alone.

There are many channels through which the Spirit can enter our lives and bring us the help we need. But there is one condition which is indispensable. We must desire

His help and do what in us lies to make contact with the divine. God never forces Himself upon us ; He only comes to those who seek Him. It may be that our longing for Him is faint and fitful, but some longing there must be. If the time comes when we are so engrossed with material things that the divine has ceased to have any meaning for us and we are content to live as though there was no God, then we shall by our own deliberate choice be excluding Him from our lives and making it impossible for Him to come to us.

But if we have refused to allow our lower nature to gain so complete a mastery over us that it has altogether crushed our spiritual life ; if we are in some measure and at some time, at least, still reaching upwards, God can come in to strengthen the things which remain and are ready to die. And He will come in ways which vary with our individual temperaments and, to a certain extent, with our individual training. It is for us to discover what are the most natural means of our approach to God and His approach to us, and to make the fullest use of them. The very fact that the Spirit co-operates with our own spiritual efforts, and does not act independently of the personality of those whom He is helping, implies that His activity will not always be along uniform lines. It is contrary to all our experience of human nature to suppose that there is any one means by which God can enter the lives of men. There are some to whom He speaks most clearly when they are alone in the quietness of their own room ; there are others to whom He seems nearest when they are joining with their fellows in common worship. To very many the Sacraments are the most certain channels of divine grace, but there are those who gain the deepest sense of His Presence in simple services of prayer and devotion. Others, again,

will say that God is never so near them as when they are on the hills or walking in a forest, while some know that He comes closest to them through music or through poetry.

It was at sundry times and in divers manners that God spake in times past unto our fathers ; it is at sundry times and in divers manners that He speaks to us to-day. But in whatever way and with whatever language He speaks, the result will be the same. His word is with power and giveth life, and those who hear it will surely find that out of weakness they are becoming strong, that things which seemed impossible are, after all, within their reach. They will not become perfect in a day, nor in a year, nor even in a lifetime, but those who know them best will see in them the gradual change from selfishness to service, the steady growth from worldliness to Christ.

CHAPTER XII

THE VISION OF THE KINGDOM

MORE than two thousand five hundred years ago a Jewish statesman dreamed of a golden age which should dawn upon his nation and through his nation upon the whole world, and saw in a vision the coming of one who should bring that golden age into being and lead mankind out of all its troubles and perplexities into a new and better world. They were dark days in which the statesman lived. Externally his country was threatened by powerful enemies, who, it seemed certain, would sooner or later overwhelm her and take away her freedom. Internally the social life of the people was in a desperate plight ; on the one hand luxury and wealth, on the other poverty and squalor lived side by side. The rich knew nothing of sympathy or pity, the poor knew nothing of justice or fair play. Religion was at a low ebb ; outwardly its worship was splendid and elaborate, its priests were unremitting in the performance of their offices, its sacrificial ceremonies were thronged with worshippers. But it was all empty show, with nothing in it to touch men's consciences or uplift the common life.

Isaiah was not blind to the evils of his day ; it is from his writings that we learn, more than from any other source, the full tale of the dangers which threatened his country. But in spite of all he never lost sight of the

vision which he believed had come to him through the direct inspiration of God, never lost faith in the golden age which lay in front. And, because he was a poet as well as a statesman, he enshrined his dream in language which, while the world lasts, will never be forgotten. It would take too long to repeat all that he wrote about it, nor need we do so. He crystallises and sums up his vision in one short passage. "They shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain ; for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea." There was to dawn upon the world a golden age in which all that hurts human life and mars man's happiness would be dethroned, cruelty and injustice and selfishness would be put away, hatred and strife and bitterness would cease to be, the long-lost Paradise would be regained. The power by which so great a miracle would be wrought was a new knowledge of God which would burst upon the world. Just as on an autumn morning the earth is dark and cheerless until the wind arises and drives away the mists which are hiding the glory of the sunlight ; so there would pour over the world the life-giving wind of the Spirit to drive away the clouds of ignorance and worldliness which obscured the face of God ; men would see and know Him, His power would change their hearts, and the golden age would come.

That was something of the dream which Isaiah saw. He passed away, and seven centuries slowly unfolded themselves. Again and again during those years men asked when would God usher in the golden age of which the prophet had spoken, where was the promise of His coming. Danger still threatened, cruelty and injustice were still rife, selfishness was still rampant, weakness and poverty were still oppressed. And still God seemed to tarry.

They looked for Him to come suddenly, in a dramatic and catastrophic way, on the clouds of heaven, surrounded by legions of angels ; they expected Him to set up His throne visibly at Jerusalem, to overthrow His enemies in one tremendous onslaught and by His almighty power to inaugurate the reign of peace and righteousness. But God never spoke, or so it seemed to them.

Then, seven hundred years after Isaiah had dreamed of the golden age, a little child was born in Palestine and the golden age had its birth in a guise that men had little thought of. They had looked for some dramatic intervention of God into the world's life, something which could neither be resisted nor gainsayed. Who in his senses would connect the birth of a child in a workman's home with the splendid visions of the golden age ? Then, as at all times, men measured the Divine by human standards. They had forgotten, perhaps, the experience of an earlier prophet than Isaiah, to whom God spoke neither in tempest, nor in earthquake, nor in fire, but by a still small voice.

That child, when He grew to manhood, taught the world that God's Kingdom, for that was the name He gave to the golden age, would never come with observation, God would never force His rule upon an unwilling world. The Kingdom would only grow, *could* only grow and govern the world, as men and women came to see and believe in its beauty, and were willing to deny themselves in order that it might be built. Love and self-sacrifice were the stones of which its walls were to be formed and these were qualities of which every man and woman in the world was capable. God could only act through the lives of individual men and women, and Jesus taught, by precept and still more by the example of His life, that when men learned to care more for other

people than themselves, when the strong were eager to lend their strength to the weak and to share the burdens of the heavy laden, when men were ready for self-sacrifice and self-denial, when they thought more of service and of ministering to others than of being served and ministered to themselves, then and only then would the golden age appear, then and only then would God's Kingdom come.

Nineteen hundred years have passed since then and still to-day we are looking for the fulfilment of Isaiah's dream. We still pray for the coming of the Kingdom ; we still wonder when the golden age will dawn, the promised time when war shall be no more, and when hardness and cruelty between man and man shall be done away ; we still ask whether men will ever learn that love is a happier thing than hatred and that it is better to help one another than to fight. And all the time, as we realise when we look back for a moment, the Kingdom has been growing. Hindered again and again by the sinfulness and selfishness of men and women, thwarted and set back by obstacles from time to time, it has none the less steadily gone forward. Nothing in the whole history of human thought and action is more amazing than the dynamic influence which the teaching of Jesus has exercised and is increasingly exercising upon the world. Unlike the great majority of such movements, it has gained rather than lost force in the course of time. As has been said already, Christ holds a firmer and a larger place in the minds of men to-day than ever before in the history of Christendom. The ideals which He taught have done more to mould the minds of men than all the achievements of soldiers and statesmen, poets and philosophers. The golden age has not yet come ; it is still far remote, buried somewhere in the unknown future ; yet we are nearer

to it to-day than ever before in the history of the world. The cause for which Christ died is marching on.

As we look back over the history of nineteen hundred years we realise that the growth of the Kingdom has in the past depended almost entirely upon the work of individual men and women, great souls who have served God, generation after generation, in outstanding ways, and have devoted their lives, without fear of men and often in face of bitter opposition, to the building of His Kingdom. The names of such will ever be remembered for all that they have achieved, in the name of Christ, to bring love and joy and righteousness into the lives of their fellow-men. But to-day we are learning that we must not depend upon a few outstanding people to fight God's battles and build His Kingdom in the world. He depends upon us all ; every single individual has his part to play in bringing nearer the golden age. No one of us dare stand aside and say, "That is not my work, that is not the kind of thing which I am called upon to do."

In former days, when nations went to war, it was upon the professional soldiers that the whole responsibility fell. Their fellow-countrymen watched them from afar and waited anxiously for news of defeat or victory. The issue of the struggle might concern them nearly, but in the struggle itself they had no part or lot ; they were spectators pure and simple. But in the Great War we learnt that nowadays every individual has his part to play, his contribution to make, in the hour of his country's stress. We did not learn the lesson at once ; "Business as usual" was the watchword for the first few months. But we learned it in due course and long before the end there was hardly an able-bodied man or woman in the country who was not doing something.

Is it not a tragedy that it needs such an upheaval as

the War to call out our capacity for service? Is it not a tragedy that we are too lazy or too selfish to obey the call of Christ as we obeyed that of our country? If we were half as enthusiastic in the cause of the Kingdom as we were in the cause of England, half as eager to make life better for other people as we were to win the War, half as determined that Christ should triumph as we were that the allied forces should be victorious, our country and the world would quickly know the difference. The opportunities for such service are not far away nor hard to come by. They meet us at every turn and in every department of our lives. Love and self-sacrifice are qualities which need never be atrophied for want of use, and love and self-sacrifice are the materials out of which the Kingdom must be built. But behind them must be something far bigger than themselves, the spiritual reality of which they are the visible expression.

Devotion to Christ, wholehearted allegiance to His teaching is the only source and motive power of a sincerely Christian life. And so we return to the question with which this book began, "What think ye of Christ?" Is He to you no more than a conventional figure, made outwardly familiar in a hundred ways, but having no vital reality, no actual touch upon your life? Or is He a visionary teacher of high ideals, Who nineteen centuries ago made the world beautiful by His presence and then passed out of it, leaving nothing but an unsubstantial dream behind Him? If He is no more to you than this or that, you will never be a builder of the Kingdom, for men will not give their service to unreal phantoms, nor to dead dreams whose day is past.

But if you can think of Him as One Who came forth from God, to reveal His nature and His will for men; if you can believe that, though He died, yet He is alive

for evermore ; if you can hear His call and challenge to come after Him ; if you can feel, however faintly, the impulse of His Spirit at work within you. If this, or something like it, is what Christ means to you, then you may count yourself, in spite of all your failings, among His servants and trust that, as He used the loaves and fishes of the lad for the glory of God and in the service of His children, so He will use your little offering of service in ways greater and more far-reaching than you can understand.

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